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SCIENCE FICTION

In this issue:

ALGIS BUDRYS
GEORGE P. ELLIOTT
CAROL EMSHWILLER
DAMON KNIGHT
JANE RICE
WILLIAM TENN

and Poul Anderson's
"The Game of Glory"

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SCIENCE FICTION

August

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THE

THE Overseas Highway, two narrow white lanes on yellowed old concrete piers, lay close to the shallow water, passed over the little key, and went on.

All afternoon, the sea had been rising. Long, greasy-faced green swells came in from the Atlantic Ocean and broke on the sharp rocks with a sudden upsurge of surf. At mid-day, the water had been far down among the coral heads. But now it was in the tumbled limestone blocks and concrete prisms that had been dumped there to build up the key. In a little while it would be washing its spume over the highway itself, and it might well go farther, with increasing wind.

It was dark with twilight, and darker with clouds thick as oil smoke covering the sun over the Gulf of Mexico. The Gulf was stirring, too, and bayous were flooding in Louisiana. But it was over the Atlantic that the hurricane was spinning. It was the broad, deep, deadly ocean that the tide and wind were pushing down through the gloom onto the side of the key where Dan Henry was struggling grimly, his massive back and shoulders naked and running with spray.

His pale eyes were red-rimmed with salt and his hide slashed shallowly in a dozen places where he had lost his balance on the tumbled stones and fallen. He had been lurching through the surf all afternoon, working

Algis Budrys

EDGE OF THE SEA

The thing rolling sluggishly in the smashing surf might have been a Navy missile . . . or it might not. Whatever it was, Dan Henry was darn sure he was going to hold on to it, in spite of the rising hurricane—or anything else.

frantically to save what he had seen, leaden and encrusted, rolling ponderously at the edge of the water. His shirt, the seat covers from his car—the fan-belt, too—and what few scraps of rope and wire had been in the trunk, all had gone for him to twist into an incredible rag or a hawser.

The men who built the Overseas Highway on the old railroad right-of-way had built up the little key, but it was still no more than a hundred feet in diameter. If the thing trapped on the rock had chosen any other islet to wash against, there would have been a reasonable chance of saving it. But there was no one living here, and nothing to use for tools or anchors. The thing was rolling and grinding against the rocks, too heavy to float but too bulky to resist the push of storm-driven water. There were bright silver gouges on its thick metal flanks, and in a little while it would break up or break free, and be lost either way. The rope—the stubborn, futile rope passed around the two stubby struts at its nose and wrapped around the great concrete block it was now butting at with brute persistence—was as much use as though Dan Henry had been a spider and tried to hold this thing in a hurriedly created web. But he had had to try, and he was trying now in another way. He jammed the soles of his feet against one concrete block and pushed his bare shoulders against another. With his belly ridged and his thighs bulging, his face

contorted and his hands clenched, he was trying to push another massive piece of stone into place behind the plunging metal thing, though his blood might erupt from his veins and the muscles tear open his flesh.

The thing was as thick through as a hog's head, and as long as two men. There was a thick-lipped, scarred opening a foot across at one end, where the body rounded sharply in a hemispherical compound curve. There were three stumpy fins rooted in the curve, their tips not extending beyond the bulge of the body, and two struts at the blunt nose like horns on a snail but bent forward so that the entire thing might have been fired out of a mysterious cannon or launched from the tubes of some unimaginable submarine. There were no visible openings, no boltheads, no seams. The entire thing might have been cast of a piece—might have been solid, except for the tube in the stern—and though barnacles clung to it and moss stained it, though the rocks gouged it and other blows had left their older scars on its pitted surface, still the thing was not visibly damaged.

Dan Henry strained at the rock, and sand grated minutely at its base. But the world turned red behind his eyes, and his muscles writhed into venomous knots, and his breath burned his chest with the fury of fire. The sea broke against him and ran into his nose and mouth. The wind moaned, and the water hissed through the rocks, crashing as it came and gurgling as it drew back. The thing groaned and grated with each sluggish move. The day grew steadily darker.

Dan Henry had stopped his car on the key at noon, pulling off the highway onto the one narrow space of shoulder. He had opened the glove compartment and taken out the waxed container of milk and the now stale sandwich he had bought in Hallandale, above Miami, at ten that morning. He lit a cigarette and unwrapped the sandwich, and began to eat. The milk had turned warm in the glove compartment and acquired an unpleasant taste, but Dan Henry had never cared how his food tasted. He paid no attention to it as he chewed the sandwich and drank the milk between drags on the cigarette. He had bought the food when he stopped for gas, and when he finished it he planned to go on immediately, driving until he reached Key West.

There was nothing specific waiting for him there. Nothing in his life had ever been waiting for him anywhere. But everywhere he went, he went as directly and as efficiently as possible because that was his nature. He was a physically powerful, reasonably intelligent, ugly man who drew his strength from a knowledge that nothing could quite overcome him. He asked no more of the world. He was thirty years old, and had been a construction foreman, a police officer, an MP sergeant in Germany and a long-haul trailer truck driver. In addition to these things he had been born into a derrick rigger's family in Oklahoma and raised in his father's nomadic, self-sufficient tradition.

When he first saw the dull color of metal down among the rocks, he got out of the car to see what it was. He was already thinking in terms of its possible usefulness when he reached the thing. Once near it, the idea of salvage rights came naturally!

Looking at it, he felt immediately that it had to be a military instrument of some kind. The Navy, he knew, was constantly firing rockets from Cape Kennedy, up in Central Florida. But the longer he looked at the thing, the longer he doubted that possibility. The thing was too massive, too obviously built to take the kind of vicious punishment it was receiving at the hands of the sea, to be the light, expendable shell that was a missile prototype or a high altitude test rocket. There were tons of metal in it, and the barnacles were thick on it. He wondered how long it had been surging along the bottom, urged and tumbled by the great hidden forces of the ocean, drifting this way and that until finally the first high tide this morning, had heaved it up here to lie caught and scraping on the rocks, steaming as it dried under the early sun.

He did not know what it was, he decided finally. Rocket, torpedo, shell, bomb, or something else, whatever it was, it was valuable and important. The Navy or the Army or Air Force would need it or want it for something.

There was nothing on it to mark it as anyone's property. If anything had even been written or engraved on that hull, it was gone now. He began to think of how he might establish his rights until he could reach a Navy installation of some kind. The only reason he had for going to Key West was that he had a friend in the sponge-diving business down there. The friend did not know he was coming, so there was no reason not to delay for as long as this business might take him.

He had begun with nothing more than that to urge him on, but as the afternoon grew, the sea and the thing between them had trapped him.

The thing lay awash with half its length over the usual high water mark, and even when he found it, at low tide, the water curled among the rocks above it. He had thought about that, too, but he had not thought that a hurricane might have taken an unexpected turn during the night, while he drove his old car without a radio to tell him so. Only when the clouds turned gray and the water swirled around his knees like a pack of hounds grown hungry did he stop for a moment and look out to sea.

He had been clearing the smaller rocks away from around the thing and piling them in an open-ended square enclosing its forward sections, and had been scraping a clean patch in the barnacles with a tire iron. It had been his intention to make it obvious someone was working on the thing, so he could then leave it and report it with a clear claim. The few cars going by on the highway had not stopped or slowed down—there was no place to stop, with his car on the bit of shoulder, and no real

reason to slow down—and after a while the cars had stopped coming entirely.

It was that, telling him the storm had probably caused the highway to be blocked off at either end, together with the look of the sea, that made him go up in the car and try to make a hawser. And by then he could not have left the thing. It was too obvious that a man had begun a job of work here. If he left it now, it would be too plain that someone had let himself be backed down.

If he had gotten in his car and driven away, he would not have been Dan Henry.

The water was almost completely over the thing now. He himself was working with the waves breaking over his head, trying to dislodge him. More important, the thing was rocking and slipping out of its trap.

The next nearest key was a third of a mile away, bigger than this one, but still uninhabited. The nearest inhabited place was Greyhound Key, where the rest stop was for the buses, and that was out of sight. It would be battened down, and probably evacuated. Dan Henry was all alone, with the highway empty above him and the sea upon him.

He set his back once more, and pushed against the concrete block again. If he could wedge the thing, even a storm tide might not be able to take it away from him. He could untangle his homemade rope and put the fan belt back on his car. Then he could drive away to someplace until the storm died down.

The blood roared in Dan Henry's ears, and the encrusted concrete block opened the hide over his shoulders. A coughing grunt burst out of his mouth. The block teetered—not much, but it gave a little way. Dan Henry locked his knees and braced his back with his palms, pushing his elbows against the block, and when the next wave threw its pressure into the balance, he pushed once more. The block slipped suddenly away from him, and he was thrown aside by the wave, flung into the wet rocks above. But the thing was wedged. It could roll and rear as much as it wanted to, but it could not flounder back into the sea. Dan Henry lay over a rock, and wiped the back of his hand across his bloody mouth in satisfaction.

It was over. He could get out of here now, and hole up somewhere. After the storm, he would come back and make sure it was still here. Then he would make his claim, either at one of the little Navy stations along the chain of keys, or at the big base at Boca Chica. And that would be that except for the check in the mail. The bruises and breaks in his skin would heal over, and become nothing more than scars.

He took his rope off the thing and took it apart far enough to pick out the fan-belt. He let the rest of it wash away, shredded. As he got out of the surging water at last, he scowled slightly because he wondered if the car's spark plugs weren't wet.

It was dark now. Not quite pitch-black, for the hurricane sky to the west was banded by a past strip of sulfur-colored light at the horizon, but dark enough so that his car was only a looming shape as he climbed up to it. Then, suddenly, the wet finish and the rusty chrome of the front bumper were sparkling with the first pinpoint reflections of far-away lamps. He turned to look southward down the highway, and saw a car coming. As it came nearer, its headlights let him see the clouds of spray that billowed across the glistening road, and the leaping white heads of breakers piling up on the piers and rebounding vertically to the level of the highway. The storm was building up even more quickly than he'd thought. He wondered what kind of damned fool was crazy enough to drive the stretches where the highway crossed open water between keys, and had his answer when a spotlight abruptly reached out and fingered him and his car. Either the state or the county police were out looking to make sure no one was trapped away from shelter.

The police car pulled up, wet and hissing, half-blocking the highway, and the driver immediately switched on his red roof beacon, either through force of habit or force of training, even though there was no oncoming traffic to warn. The four rotating arms of red light tracked monotonously over the road, the key and the water. By their light, Dan Henry realized for the first time that it was raining furiously. The spotlight was switched off, and the headlights pointed away, up the highway. It was the red beacon that lit the scene and isolated the two men inside its color.

The officer did not get out of the car. He waited for Dan Henry to come around to his side, and only then cranked his window down half way.

"Trouble with the car?" he asked, hidden behind the reflection on the glass. Then he must have thought better of it, seeing Dan Henry's broken skin. He threw the door open quickly, and slid out with his hand on the bone-gripped butt of his plated revolver. He was thick-bodied, with a burly man's voice and brusqueness, and he kept his eyes narrowed. "What's the story here, Mac?"

Dan Henry shook his head. "No trouble. I was down on the rocks. Waves threw me around some."

The officer's uniform pants and leather jacket were already sodden. Water ran down his face, and he wiped it annoyedly out of his eyes. "What were you doin' down there? No brains?" He watched carefully, his hands firm on his gun.

Dan Henry had been a policeman himself. He was not surprised at the officer's attitude. A policeman was paid to be irritated by anything that didn't have a simple answer.

"I've got something down there I was salvaging," he said reasonably. "Storm caught me at it and knocked me around some before I got finished." Telling about it made him realize he was tired out. He hoped

this business with the policeman would be over in a hurry, so that he could fix his car and get into its shelter. The wind was chilly, and the constant impact of driven water on the skin was beginning to make him numb.

The officer risked a quick glance down at the thrashing surf before he brought his hard eyes back to Dan Henry. "I don't see nothin'. What kind of a thing was it? What're you carryin' that belt around for?"

"It's metal," Dan Henry said. "Big. Never seen anything just like it before, I was using the belt to hold it."

The officer scowled. "What's holdin' it now? What d'you mean, big? How big? And how come I can't see it?"

"I pushed a rock behind it," Dan Henry said patiently. "It's damn near as big as a car. And it's under water, now."

"Buddy, that don't begin to sound like a likely story." The policeman pulled his gun out of the holster and held it down alongside his thigh. "What kind of a lookin' thing is it?"

"Kind of a rocket, I guess."

"Now, why the hell didn't you say so!" the policeman growled, relaxing just a little bit. "That makes sense. It'll be one of those Navy jobs. They've got 'em droppin' in the ocean like flies. But you ain't goin' to get anything out of it, Buddy. That's government property. You're supposed to turn it in. It's your duty."

"I don't think so."

"What d'you mean, you don't think so?" The policeman's gun arm was tense again.

"It doesn't look like a Navy rocket. Doesn't look like anybody's rocket, that I know of. I said it was *kind* of like a rocket. Don't know what it is, for sure." Now Dan Henry was growing angry himself. He didn't like the way things were going. He kept his attention carefully on the gun.

"Know all about rockets, do you?"

"I read the papers. This thing isn't just a piece. It isn't the bottom stage or the top stage. It's one thing, and it never was part of anything bigger. And it's been in the water maybe a couple of years without getting broken up. You show me the Navy rocket that's like that."

The policeman looked at him. "Maybe you're right," he said slowly. "Tell you what—suppose you just step over here and put my spotlight on it. Reach through the window." He stepped back casually.

Dan Henry reached around and switched the spot on. He swept it down across the water, a little startled to see how far up the breakers had come. Under the light, the water was a venomous green, full of foam, rain-splotched and furiously alive. A gust of wind rocked the car sharply, and the light with it. The pale beam shot over the sea before it fell back, reaching beyond the swinging cross of red from the roof beacon, and out there the lashing waves disappeared in a mist of rain.

He found the thing, finally, after having to hunt for it. For an instant

he thought it had been swept away after all, and felt a stab of sharp anger. But it was still there, heaving insensately under the waves, with only the dim, broad mottling of its back near enough to the surface to be seen at all, that and a constant stirring in the water, roiling it like an animal. "There it is." He was surprised how relieved he felt. "See it?"

"Yeah. Yeah, I seen enough of it," the officer said. "You got somethin' down there, all right." There was a sudden hardness in his voice, that had been waiting all along for him to make the decision that would bring it completely out. "I got my gun on you, buddy. Just step back from that car easy. Anybody foolin' around out here in a hurricane must want somethin' awful bad. If that somethin's a Navy rocket, I guess I know what kind of a son of a bitch that would be."

"Jesus Christ," Dan Henry whispered to himself. He was angry with the fine-drawn kind of rage that is almost a pleasure. And not because the cop thought he was a Commie, either, Dan Henry suddenly realized, but because he persisted in not understanding about the rocket. Or whatever it was.

He turned around with a jump. The fan-belt in his hand whipped out with all the strength in his arm and all the snap in his wrist, and snatched the cop's gun out of his hand. It skittered across the wet concrete of the highway, and Dan Henry pounced after it. He scooped it up with a scrape of his finger-tips, and crouched with the muzzle pointed dead at the cop's belly.

"Back off," he said. "Back off. You're not takin' that thing away from me. I sweated blood to hang on to it, and you're not goin' to come along and throw me in jail to get it away."

The cop retreated watchfully, his hands up without his being told, and waited for his chance. Dan Henry backed him up the highway until the cop was past the cars, and opened the door of his own car. He threw the gun inside, together with the belt. He slammed the door and said: "You can get that back later. Or you can try and take it away from me now, barehanded." He was shaking with the tension in his bunched shoulders, and his arms were open wide. He was crouched, his broad chest deep as his lungs hunted for more and more oxygen to wash the rush of blood his heart was driving through his veins. The red flood of revolving beacon on the police car swept over him in regular flashes.

"I'll wait," the cop said.

"Now," Dan Henry said, "I want you to use your radio. I want you to call in and report this. Only I want you to report it to the Navy before you call your headquarters."

The cop looked at him with a puzzled scowl. "You on the level?" he asked, and Dan Henry could see him wondering if he hadn't made a mistake, somewhere, in his thinking about what was going on here. But Dan Henry had no more time for him. The wind was a steady, strong

pressure that made him brace his left leg hard against it. The water flying across the highway was coming in solid chunks, instead of spray, and the two cars were rocking badly on their springs. The rain was streaming over them, leaving the officer's jacket a baggy, clinging mess and pounding on the top of Dan Henry's head. The sea was smashing violently into the highway piers, thundering to the wind's howl, and even here on solid ground the shock of the impacts was coming clearly up through Dan Henry's bones.

His throat was raw. Bit by bit, he and the officer had had to raise their voices until they had been shouting at each other without realizing it. "Get in the car and do it!" he yelled, and the officer came forward as he backed away to give him room.

The policeman got into his car, with Dan Henry standing watchfully a little behind the open doorframe, and switched on his radio. "Tell them where we are," Dan Henry said. "Tell them my name—Daniel Morris Henry—tell them what I said about it's not being one of their rockets—and tell them I'm claiming salvage rights. Then you can tell them the rest any way you see it."

The officer grudgingly turned the dials away from their usual settings. After a minute, he picked his microphone out of the dashboard hanger and began calling Boca Chica in a stubborn voice. At intervals, he said "Over," and threw the Receive switch. They heard the peculiar, grating crackle of radiotelephone static, trapped in the small speaker. And only that.

"Look, Buddy," the policeman said at last, "we're not goin' to get any answer. Not if we ain't got one by now. Boca Chica radio may be knocked out. Or maybe my transmitter's shorted, with all this wet. Could be anything." He jerked his head toward the water. "How much longer you want us to stay out here?" Probably because he had seen so many hurricanes, he was beginning to grow nervous.

"Try it again," Dan Henry said. He watched the officer closely, and couldn't see him doing anything wrong. Dan Henry didn't know the Boca Chica frequency; that was where the trouble might be. But he'd used a police radio often enough so that any other trick wouldn't have gotten by him.

The officer called Boca Chica for another five minutes. Then he stopped again. "No dice. Look, Buddy, you've had it. Maybe you're just a guy looking for some salvage money, like you say you are. Maybe not. But there's goin' to be waves coming across this road in a little while. Why don't we get out of here and straighten things out when this blows over?"

Dan Henry set his jaw. "Get the vibrator out of that radio. Do it." Now he had no choice. If he went with the cop that was that. They'd throw him in some jail for resisting arrest and assaulting an officer, and keep him there until they were good and ready to let him out. By then, whatever happened to the thing down here, somebody would have figured

out some way to get that Navy check instead of him. The only thing to do was to cripple the cop's radio and send him down the highway until he reached a phone. There was no guarantee that radio wouldn't work on the police frequency.

Maybe the cop would call the Navy right after he called his headquarters. Or maybe, even if he didn't, some higher brass at the headquarters would report to the Navy. Either way—if you believed it was a Navy rocket or if you didn't—it was government business. Then, maybe, the Navy would get here before the cops did. Or soon enough afterwards so he'd still be here to talk to them. Once he got taken away from here, that chance was gone.

On that decision, he was ready to cling to a hundred-foot key in the middle of an Atlantic hurricane. "Let's have that vibrator, Right now."

The officer looked at him, and reached slowly under the dash. He fumbled in the narrow space where the radio hung, and pulled the sealed aluminum cylinder out of its socket. But he was getting ready to grab for Dan Henry if he could reach him quickly enough.

"Okay," Dan Henry said, "drop it on the road and get out of here. You can get it back along with your gun. And just in case you get some brains in your head, when you get to a phone, call the Na—"

The policeman had dropped the vibrator, and the wind had rolled it under Dan Henry's Chevrolet. Dan Henry had been in the act of letting the open police car door close, when a sharp thread of brilliant violet fire punched up from down in the green water, through the red light, up through the rain, up through the black clouds, and out to the stars beyond.

"There's something *in* that thing!" the officer blurted.

Dan Henry threw the door shut. "Get out of here, man!"

Down in the drowned rocks, an arc hissed between the two struts in the thing's nose. The water leaped and bubbled around it, and for all the breakers could do, still the blaze of light illuminated the thing and the rocks it ground against, turning the sea transparent, and from the crown of the arc the thin violet column pointed without wavering, without dispersing, straight as a line drawn from hell to heaven.

The police car's tires smoked and spun on the pavement. "I'll get help," the officer shouted dimly over the squeal and the roar of his engine. Then he had traction and the car shot away, headlights slashing, glimmering in the rain and the spray, lurching from side to side under the wind's hammer, roof beacon turning at its inverting pace, the siren's howl lost quickly in the boom of the water. And Dan Henry was left in the violet-lanced darkness.

Without the windbreak of the police car in front of him, he was pushed violently backward until his own car's fender stopped him. Water struck his eyes, and the night blurred. He bent forward and rubbed his face until the raw ache of the salt was dulled to a steady throbbing, and then

he staggered across the highway to the guard rail on the Atlantic side. The tops of the incoming waves washed over his shoes, just as the surf at noon had lapped at him, twelve feet below.

The rain and the spray streamed over him. He cupped one hand over his nose, to breathe, and hung on the rail.

There was nothing more to see. The pillar of light still shot up from the arc, and the bulk of the thing loomed, gross and black, down there in the water. It was feet below the surface now, cushioned from the first smash of the waves, and it stirred with a smooth, regular motion like a whale shark in a tank.

The radio, he thought. It had felt the radio in the police car. Nothing else had happened to bring it to life at that particular moment. It had waited a little—perhaps analyzing what it had encountered, perhaps then noticing the regular flash of the car's roof beacon for the first time. And for the first time since the day, years ago, when it entered the sea, it had found a reason for sending out a signal.

To where? Not to him, or the policeman. The light was not pointed toward the highway. It went up, straight up, going out of sight through the clouds as his eyes tried to follow it before the lash of water forced his head down again.

There was no one inside the thing, Dan Henry thought. There couldn't be. He had scraped on the side with regular, purposeful strokes, clearing an exactly square patch, and gotten no response. And the thing had lain in the ocean a long time, sealed up, dragging its armored hide over the bottom as the currents pushed and pulled it, rolling, twisting, seamless, with only those two horns with which to feel the world about it.

He could be wrong, of course. Something could be alive in there, still breathing in some fantastic way from a self-contained air supply, eating tiny amounts of stored food, getting rid of its wastes somehow. But he didn't see how. It didn't seem logical that anything would trap itself like that, not knowing if it was ever going to escape.

He could be wrong about it all. It might not have been reacting to anything that happened on the highway. It might be ignoring everything outside itself, and following some purpose that had nothing to do with this world or its people. But whether it was that, or whether he was at least partly right, Dan Henry wondered what was sending things to drop down on the Earth and make signals to the stars.

The water came higher. It came up the key too quickly to split and go around it, and spilled over the highway to plunge into the rocks on the Gulf side. It broke halfway up the side of his car. He remembered the policeman's vibrator. That would be far to the west of him by now, skipping at a thrown stone's velocity over waves whose tops were being cut off by the wind. Dan Henry's mouth twisted in a numb grimace. Now he'd have to buy one. They probably wouldn't let him get away that cheaply. They could make that stick for a robbery charge. And

destroying public property. While on the other hand, if he was swept off this key they wouldn't even have to pay for his burial. He laughed drunkenly.

A wave broke over him. He had made a sling for himself by knotting the legs of his dungarees around one of the guard-rail uprights, and when the wave was past he lolled naked with the bunched tops of the dungarees cutting into his chest under his arms. The wind worked at him now, with a kind of fury he had never felt by simply putting his head out through the window of a speeding car, and then the next wave came. It was warm, but the wind evaporating it as soon as he was exposed again made his skin crawl and his teeth chatter. He reached behind him with a wooden arm and felt the knot in the dungaree legs to make sure it was holding. The pressure had tightened it into a small hard lump.

That was good, at any rate. That and the blessed practicality of the engineers who built the highway. When they laid the roadway where the hurricane-smashed railroad had been, they had cut the rusted rails up with torches, set the stumps deep in the concrete, and welded the guard rails together out of T-shaped steel designed to hold a locomotive's weight.

Dan Henry grinned to himself. The rail would hold. The dungarees would hold, or the trademark was a liar. Only about Dan Henry was there any doubt, Dan Henry—hard, sure Dan Henry, with his chest being cut in half, with his torn skin being torn again as the waves beat him against the highway, with his head going silly because he was being pounded into raw meat.

Dear God, he thought, am I doing this for *money*? No, he thought as a wave filled his nostrils, no, not any more. When that thing turned its light on and I didn't jump in the car with that cop, that's when we found out I wasn't doing it for the money. For what? God knows.

He floundered half-over on his side, arched his neck, and looked at the violet arrow through the clouds. Signal, you bastard! Go ahead and signal! Do anything. As long as I know you're still there. If you can stay put, so can I.

Well, what *was* he doing this for? Dan Henry fought with the sling that held him, trying to take some of the pressure off his chest. God knew, but it was up to Dan Henry to find out for himself.

It wasn't money. All right—that was decided. What was left—vanity? Big Dan Henry—big, strong. Dan Henry . . . take more than a hurricane to stop big, strong, wonderful Dan Henry—was that the way his thoughts were running?

He croaked a laugh. Big, strong Dan Henry was lying here limp at a calico doll, naked as a baby, praying his pants wouldn't rip. The storm had washed the pride out of him as surely as it had his first interest in the salvage money.

All right, *what*, then! He growled and cursed at his own stupidity.

Here he was, and he didn't even know why. Here he was, being bludgeoned to death, being drowned, being torn apart by the wind. He was stuck out here now, and nobody could save him.

A wave roared over the highway and struck his car a blow that sent a hubcap careening off into the darkness. The car tilted onto the Gulf-side guard rail. The rail bellied outward, and the car hung halfway over the rocks on the other side. Successive waves smashed into it, exploding in spray, and the guard rail groaned in the lull after each strike. Dan Henry watched it dully in the violet light, with the water sluicing down over his head and shoulders for a moment before the wind found it and tore it away in horizontal strings of droplets.

The car's door panels had already been pushed in, and the windows were cracked and bulged. Now the exposed floorboards were being hammered. The muffler was wrenched out.

With the next smash of solid water, the horizontal rail broke its weld at one end and the car heeled forward to the right, impaling its radiator on an upright. It hung there, gradually tearing the radiator out of its brackets, spilling rusty water for one instant before a wave washed it clean, scraping its front axle down the sharp edge of the roadway, breaking loose pieces of the concrete and raising its left rear wheel higher and higher. The radiator came free with a snap like a breaking tooth, and the car dropped suddenly, its front end caught by the edge of the left wheel, kept from falling only by the straining uprights still jammed against it farther back on the right side. The hood flew back suddenly and was gone with a twang in one gust of wind.

Am I going to have to buy that cop a new gun, too? Dan Henry thought, and in that moment the wind began to die. The water hesitated. Three waves rolled across the road slowly, much higher than when the wind was flattening them, but almost gentle. The rain slackened. And then the eye of the storm had moved over him, and he had calm.

He pushed himself to his feet at last, after he sagged out of the hold the dungarees had on his chest. He leaned against the guard rail and stared woodenly at the ocean and the thing.

The beam went up out of sight, a clean, marvelously precise line. But down at the surface, the sea was finally hiding the thing, and making a new noise that had none of a storm-sea's clean power. It filled his ears and unnerved him.

With the wind and the pressure gone, the waves were leaping upward, clashing against each other, rebounding, colliding again, peaking sharply. Dan Henry could hear the highway over the water booming faintly as the waves slammed up against its underside. But he could actually see very little. It had grown sharply darker, and what he saw were mostly the tops of the exploding waves, glimmering pale violet.

The thing was buried deep, where it lay at the foot of the key, and the

arc that had diffused most of the light was visible only as a fitful glow that shifted and danced. The violet beam seemed to spring into life of itself at the plunging surface, and it kept most of its light compressed within itself.

Dan Henry swayed on the guard rail. It was stifling hot. The thick mugginess filled his lungs and choked him. He lolled his head back. The clouds were patchy overhead, and the stars shone through in places.

There was a sudden high-pitched chime, and a concentric circle of corruscating ice-blue flame came hurtling down the beam from the thing. It came out of the sky and shot into the water, and when it touched the glimmer of the arc there was another chime, this time from the thing, and this time the water quivered. The violet beam flickered once, and a red halo spat up with a cackle, travelling slowly. When it was a hundred feet over Dan Henry's head it split in two, leaving one thin ring moving at the old rate, and a larger one that suddenly doubled its speed until it split again, doubled its speed and split again, accelerated again, and so blazed upward along the violet beam's axis, leaving a spaced trail of slowly moving lesser rings behind it. They hung in the air, a ladder to the stars. Then they died out slowly, and before they had stopped glowing the violet beam was switched off.

The sky was abruptly empty, and the thing lay quiescent in the water once more. Dan Henry blinked at the flashes swimming across his eyes. It was pitch dark. He could barely see the white of swirling water as it dashed itself into the rocks at his feet.

Except that far up the highway, coming toward him, were two headlights with a swinging red beacon just above them.

The police car was plastered with wet leaves and broken palm fronds. The policeman slammed it to a halt beside him, and flung the door open. He stopped long enough to turn his head and say: "Jesus Christ! He's still here! He ain't gone!" to someone in the front seat with him, and then he jumped out. "What happened?" he asked Dan Henry. "What was that business with the lights?"

Dan Henry looked at him. "You made it," he mumbled.

"Yeah, I made it. Got to this Navy skywatch station. Phone was out, so I couldn't call in to headquarters. Found this Navy professor up there. Brought him down with me when the eye came over. He figures we got maybe twenty minutes more before the other side of the hurricane comes around."

The other man had slid out of the car. He was a thin, bony-faced man with rimless glasses. He was dressed in a badly fitted tropical suit that was pleated with dampness. He looked at Dan Henry's purpled chest, and asked: "Are you all right?"

"Sure."

The man twitched an eyebrow. "I'm assigned to the satellite tracking station north of here. What is this thing?"

Dan Henry nodded toward it. "Down there. It got an answer to its signal, acknowledged, and switched off. That's what I think, anyhow."

"You do, eh? Well, you could be right. In any case, we don't have much time. I'll notify the naval district commandant's office as soon as the telephones are working again, but I want a quick look at it now, in case we lose it."

"We're not going to lose it," Dan Henry growled.

The professor looked at him sharply. "What makes you sure?"

"I wedged it," Dan Henry said with a tight note in his voice. "I almost ruined myself and I almost drowned, but I wedged it. I took a gun away from a cop to keep it from getting left here without anybody to watch it. And I stayed here and got almost drowned, and almost cut in half, and almost beat to death against this highway here, and *we're not going to lose it now.*"

"I . . . see," the professor said. He turned to the policeman. "If you happen to have some sedatives in your first aid kit, they might be useful now," he murmured.

"Might have something. I'll look," the policeman said with a quick glance at Dan Henry.

"And put your spotlight on the thing, please," the professor added, peering over the guard rail. "Though I don't suppose we'll see much."

The yellow beam of the spotlight slid over the top of the water. If it penetrated at all, it still did not reach any part of the thing. The policeman hunted for it, sweeping back and forth until Dan Henry made an impatient sound, went over to him, and pointed it straight. "Now, leave it there. That's where it is."

"Yeah? I don't see anythin' but water."

"That's where it is," Dan Henry said. "Haven't been here all this time for nothin'." He went back to the railing, but there was still nothing to see.

"You sure that's where it is?" the professor asked.

"Yes. It's about ten feet down."

"All right," the professor sighed. "Tell me as much as you can about its activities."

"I think it's a sounding rocket," Dan Henry said. "I think somebody from someplace sent that thing down here a while ago to find out things. I don't know what those things are. I don't know who that somebody is. But I'm pretty sure he lost it, somehow, and didn't know where it was until it signalled him just now. I don't know why it worked out that way. I don't know why the rocket couldn't get its signal through before this, or why it didn't go home."

"You think it's of extraterrestrial origin, then?"

Dan Henry looked at the professor. "You don't think so?"

"If I did, I would be on my way to district headquarters at this moment, hurricane or no hurricane," the professor said testily.

"You don't believe it?" Dan Henry persisted.

The professor grew uneasy. "No."

"Wouldn't you *like* to believe it?"

The professor looked quickly out to sea.

"Here," the policeman said, handing Dan Henry a flat brown half-pint bottle. "Sedative." He winked.

Dan Henry knocked the bottle out of the cop's hand. It broke on the pavement.

"Look up!" the professor whispered.

They turned their heads. Something huge, flat and multi-winged was shadowed faintly on the stars.

"Oh, Lord," the officer said.

There was a burst of chiming from the thing down in the water, and violet pulses of light came up through the water and burst on the underside of the thing up in the sky.

Answering darts of tawny gold came raining down. The thing in the water stirred, and they could see the rocks move.

"Tractor rays," the professor said in a husky voice. "Theoretically impossible."

"What's it going to do?" the policeman asked.

"Pick it up," the professor answered. "And take it back to wherever it comes from."

Dan Henry began to curse.

The thing in the sky slipped down, and they could feel the air throb. After a moment, the sound came to them—a distant rumbling purr, and a high metallic shrieking.

The thing in the water heaved itself upward. It struggled against the rocks.

"We'd better get back," the professor said.

The distant sound grew stronger and beat upon their ears. The professor and the policeman retreated to the car.

But Dan Henry did not. He straightened his back and gathered his muscles. As the tawny fire came down, he leaped over the guard rail into the water.

He swam with grim fury, thrown and sucked by the water, sputtering for breath, his feet pounding. Even so, he would not have reached the thing. But the water humped in the grip of the force that clutched at the thing, and the waves collapsed. Dan Henry's arms bit through the water with desperate precision, and just before the thing broke free, he was up it.

"No, sir," he grunted, closing his hand on one of the struts. "Not without me. We've been through too much together." He grinned coldly at the hovering ship as they rose to meet it.

Eleazar Lipsky . . .

author of THE KISS OF DEATH and other full-bodied novels, here gives an account of a shabby shyster who becomes a hero out of his own time.

SNITKIN'S LAW

LESTER SNITKIN was about to step into the Criminal Courts Building in New York, when suddenly the revolving door stuck and he was shimmered (there is no better word) into the Unimaginable Future. Snitkin was a lawyer; he was also small, bald, shabby, furtive, unsuccessful, untrustworthy and ugly. There was no conceivable reason why this should have happened to him.

"Who?" Snitkin protested. "What?"

The Time Machine ended its functions, having exhausted its reservoir of high energy antichronon particles, or whatever it was that made it work. In less desperate exigencies, Snitkin might have been thrown back into the sea of Past Time, but since he was the only fish in the Time Net, he was dusted off by men in white jackets, and hustled up to the Institute of Advanced Nations.

"I don't get all this," complained Snitkin. "I am entitled to an explanation." He had not long to wait.

In the Unimaginable Future (he was told), cybernetics had reached the point where stagnation and utter futility had set in. Commerce had come to a halt, the birth rate had dropped to zero, the climate was changing. The best minds—human minds, that is—had converged in what was left of the world's capital and had concluded that the decline of civilization was due to the central machine of all—the Justice Machine.

The difficulty was that the Justice Machine, a vast pulsating structure housed in what was left of the Criminal Courts Building, and linked in cunning relays and booster devices to sub-assemblies scattered about the country, was designed to dispense justice to all—even-handed, inexorable, perfect justice. And that was horror beyond description!

Automation had reached the point where twice monthly by legal fiat—fiat prescribed by the machine itself—each citizen was scanned by Theta-scanners (too complex to explain), carefully identified, and examined hypnotically under drugs for errors, mistakes, wilful transgressions, sins of omission and commission, misdemeanors and evil thoughts against the Justice Machine.

All conceivable codes, measures and penalties were retained on tape by infallible memory banks. Penalties were swift, sure and dreadful. From the populace rose loud wails of woe and cries for succour. That was where Snitkin came in—snatched from the past to save the future.

Snitkin listened carefully, and then spoke. "Gentlemen, I don't see the problem," he observed in adenoidal accents which the Unimaginable Future found piquant and charming—adenoids having been abolished. "You've still got a Constitution of the United States? You've still got a Fifth Amendment that protects?"

He was told what had happened to those noble documents. His face turned a greenish, dirty color, which was his equivalent of pallor, and he whispered, "Not even a copy left? Not even in the law libraries?"

He was told what had happened to those adjuncts of the legal profession—a profession made obsolete by science.

"Well, gentlemen," said Snitkin finally, quoting an ancient text, "the legal mind is equal to the exigencies of the occasion. Where is this so-called Justice Machine?"

He was returned to the place from whence he came. Things had not changed much at the Criminal Courts Building, except that dirty bits of straw littered the granite courtyard and pigs and cattle grunted and wallowed. A side entrance was still relatively clear. Not so deep as a well, nor as wide as a churchyard, but enough to get into the ancient ruin.

Snitkin paused, overcome with emotion, and gazed about the Hall where once an Information Booth had stood. Remains of a Press Room, a Lunch Bar, Telephone Booths, and Psychiatric Clinic were marked by bronze tablets erected by an Historical Society of Antiquarians. When he recovered, he called for a judicial robe—one was hastily improvised from black cloth—and impressively affixed a pince-nez which had come with him on a black ribbon.

"Gentlemen, it's perfectly clear," he said learnedly. "Transparently clear. Things are in a state of hopeless confusion. Do the ends justify the means? Who takes care of this device?"

A trembling man with oily hands and a thin neck was shoved forward. His name was Gus and he was the Keeper of the Justice Machine. It was an hereditary civil service sinecure handed down through the generations from father to son. Gus admitted that he held the key to the cellar.

"You go ahead, Gus," said Snitkin sternly. "I'll follow."

Hours later Snitkin emerged, panting, streaked with grease and dust, but smug and satisfied.

"Gentlemen," he announced oracularly, "we can go about our business. I have invoked an ancient legal remedy which comes down from our earliest Anglo-Saxon jurisprudence. Long before the Constitution, before Magna Carta, even before the Institutes of Justinian, there were machines.

Yes, and in those days, the recourse of individual man against the machine was simple."

Snitkin coughed and gazed at the ranks gathered in mute appeal. Almost, in imagination, he was addressing a jury of his client's peers, only now his client was All Humanity. "Gentlemen, you are in misery! Why? Because you have been getting perfect, machine-made justice, gentlemen. And the truth is that the average human being does not want perfect justice! He wants something else—eats, love, a hot daily double—but it is not in human nature to want justice! Do I make myself clear?"

Snitkin called for a glass of water. "Gentlemen, what to do? The answer is simple enough to the legal mind. I have with the help of my, ah, colleague and friend, Gus, introduced into this monster a gadget which provides what we might call a random or luck factor—a do-hickey, a dingus, a zinger. Gus calls it a loose vibrator on an eccentric cam, but what the hell? From now on, I don't know what you'll get, but one thing I guarantee: you won't get perfect justice! Gentlemen, the answer to the machine is to fix the machine. I use that word in its strictest sense. *You fix the machine!*"

In the deathly silence, Snitkin raised a restraining hand and stood on tiptoes to give the illusion of height. "Now, my dear friends, we can go about our business, happy in the knowledge that we have restored a forgotten way of life. Over these halls I would like to see the motto: Round and round the little ball goes and where she falls nobody knows! And, or, yes—"

But already a patter of applause was rising, a shuffling of relief.

"Oh, yes," said Snitkin loudly, "and I would remind you that I intend to open my offices across the street where in a past millenium I once prastised law. I am not a learned man, but I can say without fear of contradiction that I am the only living man who still knows how to put in the fix. Where do I send my bill?"

This then is the story of Snitkin. To the end of a long, useful, honored, happy life, he kept a busy office. Presidents of bar associations delivered eulogies, district leaders followed the coffin to the grave. He died a rich man.

Gus died even richer.*

THE END

* *Historical Note:* It is only now that the theory of the Justice Machine has been satisfactorily established. According to the Theory of Improbability, all moral qualities can be suitably quantified under the so-called Lenin-Stalin-Khrushchev Transformation Equations. By these fruitful formulations, it was discovered early in the twentieth century that everything can be taken to mean anything else provided that the number field be restricted to the transcendentals.

When the original circuits of the Justice Machine were wired, the

principle followed was: Liberty and Justice for All. This principle can be represented as follows:

$$L + J = 1$$

where L=Liberty; J=Justice; and 1=All.

It is evident that as J increases in value, L will decrease. In simple terms, the more Justice, the less Liberty. This is almost a truism.

Following Snitkin, the instructions were re-examined carefully in the light of an ancient forgotten principle that a thinking machine is only as smart as its input of instructions. The formula was modified to:

$$\frac{J}{L} = 1$$

Or:

$$J = 1 (L)$$

From which it follows, the more Justice, the *more* Liberty. This has come to be known as "Snitkin's Law."

Snitkin's Law was put into effect everywhere, except in Saudi Arabia, where the technique of lopping hands for theft seems to get results as satisfactory as methods used in more advanced jurisdictions. This too follows from the Lenin-Stalin-Khrushchev Equations.

PSORIASIS.

- PSORIASIS forms a white lustrous scale on a reddened area of skin. Both the scale and skin are always dry unless broken or brought away by too much scratching or combing. In most cases the reddened skin is of normal temperature and the scale thick and raised on the skin, especially on the scalp, elbows and knees. Where the skin is of a finer texture, as on the body, scaling takes place as thin flakes or a light powder.
- PSORIASIS may be hereditary, may occur with puberty, may follow injury, exposure, shock or worry, or may be due to faulty nutrition and faulty elimination. It may also be persistent and recurring and sufferers often despair of ever having a clear and healthy skin.
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Is the shooting of a deer or
the butchering of a pig
murder? Consider, then, the
problems of a lone hunter
on a new and differently
populated world—the ter-
rible decisions he must make
—and the after-thoughts he
must live with . . .*

**Carol
Emshwiller's**

PELT

SHE was a white dog with a wide face and eager eyes, and this was the planet, Jaxa, in winter.

She trotted well ahead of the master, sometimes nose to ground, sometimes sniffing the air, and she didn't care if they were being watched or not. She knew that strange things skulked behind iced trees, but strangeness was her job. She had been trained for it, and crisp, glittering Jaxa was, she felt, exactly what she *had* been trained for, *born* for.

I love it, I love it . . . that was in her pointing ears, her waving tail . . . I *love* this place.

It was a world of ice, a world with the sound of breaking goblets. Each time the wind blew they came shattering down by the trayful, and each time one branch brushed against another it was, Skoal, Down the, hatch, To the Queen . . . tink, tink, tink. And the sun was reflected as if from a million cut-glass punch bowls a million crystal chandeliers.

She wore four little black boots, and each step she took sounded like two or three more goblets gone, but the sound was lost in the other tinkling, snapping, cracklings of the silver, frozen forest about her.

She had figured out at last what that hovering scent was. It had been there from the beginning, the landing two days ago, mingling with Jaxa's bitter air and seeming to be just a part of the smell of the place, she found it in criss-crossing trails about the squatting ship, and hanging, heavy and recent, in hollows behind flat-

branched, piney-smelling bushes. She thought of honey and fat men and dry fur when she smelled it.

There was something big out there, and more than one of them, more than two. She wasn't sure how many. She had a feeling this was something to tell the master, but what was the signal, the agreed upon noise for: We are being watched? There was a whisper of sound, short and quick, for: Sighted close, come and shoot. And there was a noise for danger (all these through her throat mike to the receiver at the master's ear), a special, howly bark: Awful, awful—there is something awful going to happen. There was even a noise, a low, rumble of sound for: Wonderful, wonderful fur—drop everything and come after *this* one. And she knew a good fur when she saw one. (She had been trained to know.) But there was no sign for: We are being watched.

She'd whined and barked when she was sure about it, but that had got her a pat on the head and a rumpling of the neck fur. "You're doing fine, Baby. This world is our oyster, all ours. All we got to do is pick up the pearls. Jaxa's what we've been waiting for." And Jaxa was, so she did her work and didn't try to tell him anymore, for what was one more strange thing in one more strange world?

She was on the trail of something now, and the master was behind her, out of sight. He'd better hurry. He'd better hurry or there'll be waiting to do, watching the thing, whatever it is, steady on until he comes, holding tight back, and that will be hard. Hurry, hurry.

She could hear the whispered whistle of a tune through the receiver at her ear and she knew he was not hurrying but just being happy. She ran on, eager, curious. She did not give the signal for hurry, but she made a sound of her own, and she heard him stop whistling and whisper back into the mike, "So, so, Queen of Venus. The furs are waiting to be picked. No hurry, Baby." But morning was to her for hurry. There was time later to be tired and slow.

That fat-man honeyish smell was about, closer and strong. Her curiosity became two-pronged—this smell or that? What *is* the big thing that watches? She kept to the trail she was on, though. Better to be sure, and this thing was not so elusive, not twisting and doubling back, but up ahead and going where it was going.

She topped a rise and half slid, on thick furred rump, down the other side, splattering ice. She snuffed at the bottom to be sure of that smell again, and then, nose to ground, trotted past a thick and tangled hedge-row.

She was thinking through her nose now. The world was all smell, crisp air and sour ice and turpentine pine . . . and this animal, a urine and brown grass thing . . . and then, strong in front of her, honey-furry-fat man.

She felt it looming before she raised her head to look, and there it was,

the smell in person, some taller than the master and twice as wide. Counting his doubled suit and all, twice as wide.

This was a fur! Wonderful, wonderful. But she just stood, looking up, mouth open and lips pulled back, the fur on the back of her neck rising more from the suddenness than from fear.

It was silver and black, a tiger-striped thing, and the whitish parts glistened and caught the light as the ice of Jaxa did, and sparkled and dazzled in the same way. And there, in the center of the face, was a large and terrible orange eye, rimmed in black with black radiating lines crossing the forehead and rounding the head. That spot of orange dominated the whole figure, but it was a flat, blind eye, unreal, grown out of fur. At first she saw only that spot of color, but then she noticed under it two small, red glinting eyes and they were kind, not terrible.

This was the time for the call; Come, come and get the great fur, the huge-price-tag fur for the richest lady on earth to wear and be dazzling in and most of all to pay for. But there was something about the flat, black nose and the tender, bow-shaped lips and those kind eyes that stopped her from calling. Something master-like. She was full of wondering and indecision and she made no sound at all.

The thing spoke to her then, and its voice was a deep lullaby sound of buzzing cellos. It gestured with a thick, fur-backed hand. It promised, offered, and asked; and she listened, knowing and not knowing.

The words came slowly.

This . . . is . . . world.

Here is the sky, the earth, the ice. The heavy arms moved. The hands pointed.

We have watched you, little slave. What have you done that is free today? Take the liberty. Here is the earth for your four shoed feet, the sky of stars, the ice to drink. Do something free today. Do, do.

Nice voice, she thought, nice thing. It gives and gives . . . something.

Her ears pointed forward, then to the side, one and then the other, and then forward again. She backed her head, but the real meaning would not come clear. She poked at the air with her nose.

Say that again, her whole body said. I almost have it. I *feel* it. Say it once more and maybe then the sense of it will come.

But the creature turned and started away quickly, very quickly for such a big thing, and disappeared behind the trees and bushes. It seemed to shimmer itself away until the glitter was only the glitter of the ice and the black was only the thick, flat branches.

The master was close. She could hear his crackling steps coming up behind her.

She whined softly, more to herself than to him.

"Ho, the Queen, Aloora. Have you lost it?" She sniffed the ground again. The honey-furry smell was strong. She sniffed beyond, zig-zag-

ging. The trail was there. "Go to it, Baby." She loped off to a sound like Chinese wind chimes, business-like again. Her tail hung guilty, though, and she kept her head low. She had missed an important signal. She'd waited until it was too late. But was the thing a man, a master? Or a fur? She wanted to do the right thing. She always tried and tried for that, but now she was confused.

She was getting close to whatever it was she trailed, but the hovering smell was still there too, though not close. She thought of gifts. She knew that much from the slow, lullaby words, and gifts made her think of bones and meat, not the dry fishy biscuit she always got on trips like this. A trickle of drool flowed from the side of her mouth and froze in a silver thread across her shoulder.

She slowed. The thing she trailed must be there, just behind the next row of trees. She made a sound in her throat . . . ready, steady . . . and she advanced until she was sure. She sensed the shape. She didn't really see it . . . mostly it was the smell and something more in the tinkling glassware noises. She gave the signal and stood still, a furry, square imitation of a pointer. Come, hurry. This waiting is the hardest part.

He followed, beamed to her radio. "Steady, Baby. Hold that pose. Good girl, good girl." There was only the slightest twitch of her tail as she wagged it, answering him in her mind.

He came up behind her and then passed, crouched, holding the rifle before him, elbows bent. He knelt then, and waited as if at a point of his own, rifle to shoulder. Slowly he turned with the moving shadow of the beast, and shot, twice in quick succession.

They ran forward then, together, and it was what she had expected—a deer-like thing, dainty hoofs, proud head, and spotted in three colors large grey-green rounds on tawny yellow, with tufts of that same glittering silver scattered over.

The master took out a sharp, flat bladed knife. He began to whistle out loud as he cut off the handsome head. His face was flushed.

She sat down nearby, mouth open in a kind of smile, and she watched his face as he worked. The warm smell made the drool come at the sides of her mouth and drip out to freeze on the ice and on her paws, but she sat quietly, only watching.

Between the whistlings he grunted and swore and talked to himself, and finally he had the skin and the head in a tight inside-out bundle.

Then he came to her and patted her sides over the ribs with a flat, slap sound, and he scratched behind her ears and held a biscuit to her on his thick-gloved palm. She swallowed it whole and then watched him as he squatted on his heels and himself ate one almost like it.

Then he got up and slung the bundle of skin and head across his back. "I'll take this one, Baby. Come on, let's get one more something before lunch." He waved her to the right. "We'll make a big circle," he said.

She trotted out, glad she was not carrying anything. She found a strong smell at a patch of discolored ice and urinated on it. She sniffed and growled at a furry, mammal-smelling bird that landed in the trees above her and sent down a shower of ice slivers on her head. She zig-zagged and then turned and bit, lips drawn back in mock rage, at a branch that scraped her side.

She followed for a while the chattering sound of water streaming along under the ice, and left it where an oily, lambish smell crossed. Almost immediately she came upon them—six, small, greenish balls of wool with floppy, woolly feet. The honey-fat man smell was strong here too, but she signaled for the lambs, the Come and shoot sound, and she stood again waiting for the master.

"Good girl!" His voice had special praise. "By God, this place is a gold mine. Hold it, Queen of Venus. Whatever it is, don't let go."

There was a fifty-yard clear view here and she stood in plain sight of the little creatures, but they didn't notice. The master came slowly and cautiously, and knelt beside her. Just as he did, there appeared at the far end of the clearing a glittering, silver and black tiger-striped man.

She heard the sharp inward breath of the master and she felt the tenseness come to him. There was a new, faint whiff of sour sweat, a stiff silence and a special way of breathing. What she felt from him made the fur rise along her back with a mixture of excitement and fear.

The tiger thing held a small packet in one hand and was peering into it and pulling at the opening in it with a blunt finger. Suddenly there was a sweep of motion beside her and five fast, frantic, shots sounded sharp in her ear. Two came after the honey-fat man had already fallen and lay like a huge, decorated sack.

The master ran forward and she came at his heels. They stopped, not too close and she watched the master looking at the big, dead, tiger head with the terrible eye. The master was breathing hard and seemed hot. His face was red and puffy looking, but his lips made a hard whitish line. He didn't whistle or talk. After a time he took out his knife. He tested the blade, making a small, bloody thread of a mark on his left thumb. Then he walked closer and she stood and watched him and whispered a questioning whine.

He stooped by the honey-fat man and it was that small, partly opened packet that he cut viciously through the center. Small round chunks fell out, bite sized chunks of dried meat and a cheesy substance and some broken bits of clear, bluish ice.

The master kicked at them. His face was not red anymore, but olive-pale. His thin mouth was open in a grin that was not a grin.

He went about the skinning then.

He did not keep the flat-faced, heavy head nor the blunt fingered hands.

The man had to make a sliding thing of two of the widest kind of flat branches to carry the new heavy fur, as well as the head and the skin of the deer. Then he started directly for the ship.

It was past eating time but she looked at his restless eyes and did not ask about it. She walked before him, staying close. She looked back often, watching him pull the sled thing by the string across his shoulder and she knew, by the way he held the rifle before him in both hands, that she should be wary.

Sometimes the damp-looking, inside-out bundle hooked on things, and the master would curse in a whisper and pull at it. She could see the bundle made him tired, and she wished he would stop for a rest and food as they usually did long before this time.

They went slowly, and the smell of honey-fat man hovered as it had from the beginning. They crossed the trails of many animals. Even, they saw another deer run off, but she knew that it was not a time for chasing.

Then another big silver and black tiger stood exactly before them. It appeared suddenly, as if actually it had been standing there all the time, and they had not been near enough to see it, to pick it out from its glistening background.

It just stood and looked and dared, and the master held his gun with both hands and looked too, and she stood between them glancing from one face to the other. She knew, after a moment, that the master would not shoot, and it seemed the tiger thing knew too, for it turned to look at her and it raised its arms and spread its fingers as if grasping at the forest on each side. It swayed a bit, like bigness off balance, and then it spoke in its tight-strung, cello tones. The words and the tone seemed the same as before.

Little slave, what have you done that is free today? Remember this is world. Do something free today. Do, do.

She knew that what it said was important to it, something she should understand, a giving and a taking away. It watched her, and she looked back with wide, innocent eyes, wanting to do the right thing, but not knowing what.

The tiger-fat man turned then, this time slowly, and left a wide back for the master and her to see, and then it half turned, throwing a quick glance over the heavy humped shoulder at the two of them. Then it moved slowly away into the trees and ice, and the master still held the gun with two hands and did not move.

The evening wind began to blow, and there sounded about them that sound of a million chandeliers tinkling and clinking like gigantic wind chimes. A furry bird, the size of a shrew and as fast, flew by between them with a miniature shriek.

She watched the master's face, and when he was ready she went along beside him. The soft sounds the honey-fat man had made echoed in her mind but had no meaning.

That night the master stretched the big skin on a frame and afterwards he watched the dazzle of it. He didn't talk to her. She watched him a while and then she turned around three times on her rug and lay down to sleep.

The next morning the master was slow, reluctant to go out. He studied charts of other places, round or hourglass-shaped maps with yellow dots and labels, and he drank his coffee standing up looking at them. But finally they did go out, squinting into the ringing air.

It was her world. More each day, she felt it was so, right feel, right temperature, lovely smells. She darted on ahead as usual, yet not too far today, and sometimes she stopped and waited and looked at the master's face as he came up. And sometimes she would whine a question before she went on . . . Why don't you walk brisk, brisk, and call me Queen of Venus, Aloora, Galaxa, or Bitch of Betelgeuse? Why don't you sniff like I do? Sniff, and you will be happy with this place . . . And she would run on again.

Trails were easy to find, and once more she found the oily lamb smell, and once more came upon them quickly. The master strode up beside her and raised his gun . . . but a moment later he turned, carelessly, letting himself make a loud noise, and the lambs ran. He made a face, and spit upon the ice. "Come on Queen. Let's get out of here. I'm sick of this place."

He turned and made the signal to go back, pointing with his thumb above his head in two jerks of motion.

But why, why? This is morning now and our world. She wagged her tail and gave a short bark, and looked at him, dancing a little on her back paws, begging with her whole body.

"Come on," he said.

She turned then, and took her place at his heel, head low, but eyes looking up at him, wondering if she had done something wrong, and wanting to be right and noticed and loved because he was troubled and preoccupied.

They'd gone only a few minutes on the way back when he stopped suddenly in the middle of a step, slowly put both feet flat upon the ground and stood like a soldier at a stiff, off-balance attention. There, lying in the way before them, was the huge, orange-eyed head and in front of it, as if at the end of outstretched arms, lay two leathery hands, the hairless palms up.

She made a growl deep in her throat and the master made a noise almost exactly like hers, but more a groan. She waited for him, standing as he stood, not moving, feeling his tenseness coming in to her. Yet it was just a head and two hands of no value, old ones they had had before and thrown away.

He turned and she saw a wild look in his eyes. He walked with

deliberate steps, and she followed, in a wide circle about the spot. When they had skirted the place, he began to walk very fast.

They were not far from the ship. She could see its flat blackness as they drew nearer to the clearing where it was, the burned, iceless pit of spewed and blackened earth. And then she saw that the silver tiger men were there, nine of them in a wide circle, each with the honey-damp fur smell, but each with a separate particular sweetness.

The master was still walking very fast, eyes down to watch his footing, and he did not see them until he was there in the circle before them all, standing there like nine upright bears in tiger suits.

He stopped and made a whisper of a groan, and he let the gun fall low in one hand so that it hung loose with the muzzle almost touching the ground. He looked from one to the other and she looked at him, watching his pale eyes move along the circle.

"Stay," he said, and then he began to go toward the ship at an awkward limp, running and walking at the same time, banging the gun handle against the air lock as he entered.

He had said, Stay. She sat watching the ship door and moving her front paws up and down because she wanted to be walking after him. He was gone only a few minutes, though, and when he came back it was without the gun and he was holding the great fur with cut pieces of thongs dangling like ribbons along its edges where it had been tied to the stretching frame. He went at that same run-walk, unbalanced by the heavy bundle, to one of them along the circle. Three gathered together before him and refused to take it back. They pushed it, bunched loosely, back across his arms again and to it they added another large and heavy package in a parchment bag, and the master stood, with his legs wide to hold it all.

Then one honey-fat man motioned with a fur-backed hand to the ship and the bundles, and then to the ship and the master, and then to the sky. He made two sharp sounds once, and then again. And another made two different sounds, and she felt the feeling of them . . . Take your things and go home. Take them, these and these, and go.

They turned to her then and one spoke and made a wide gesture. *This is the world. The sky, the earth, the ice.*

They wanted her to stay. They gave her . . . was it their world? But what good was a world?

She wagged her tail hesitantly, lowered her head and looked up at them . . . I do want to do right, to please everybody, everybody, but . . . Then she followed the master into the ship.

The locks rumbled shut. "Let's get out of here," he said. She took her place, flat on her side, take-off position. The master snapped the flat plastic sheet over her, covering head and all and, in a few minutes, they roared off.

Afterwards he opened the parchment bag. She knew what was in it. She knew he knew too, but she knew by the smell. He opened it and dumped out the head and the hands. His face was tight and his mouth stiff.

She saw him almost put the big head out the waste chute, but he didn't. He took it in to the place where he kept good heads and some odd paws or hoofs, and he put it by the others there.

Even she knew this head was different. The others were all slant-browed like she was and most had jutting snouts. This one seemed bigger than the big ones, with its heavy, ruffled fur and huge eye staring, and more grand than any of them, more terrible . . . and yet a flat face, with a delicate, black nose and tender lips.

The tenderest lips of all.



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may we introduce . . .

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Bombs and his son . . .

Makes Much Radiation

in—

EASTWARD HO!

by

William Tenn

THE new Jersey Turnpike had been hard on the horses. South of New Brunswick the potholes had been so deep, the scattered boulders so plentiful, that the two men had been forced to move at a slow trot, to avoid crippling their three precious animals. And, of course, this far south, farms were non-existent: they had been able to eat nothing but the dried provisions in the saddlebags, and last night they had slept in a roadside service station, suspending their hammocks between the tilted, rusty gas pumps.

But it was still the best, the most direct route, Jerry Franklin knew. The Turnpike was a government road: its rubble was cleared semi-annually. They had made excellent time and come through without even developing a limp in the pack-horse. As they swung out on the last lap, past the riven tree-stump with the words TRENTON EXIT carved on its side, Jerry relaxed a bit. His father, his father's colleagues, would be proud of him. And he was proud of himself.

But the next moment, he was alert again. He roweled his horse, moved up alongside his companion, a young man of his own age.

"Protocol," he reminded. "I'm the leader here. You know better than to ride ahead of me this close to Trenton."

He hated to pull rank. But facts were facts, and if a subordinate got above himself he was asking to be set down. After all, he was the son—and the oldest son, at that—of the Senator from Idaho; Sam Rutherford's father was a mere Undersecretary of State and Sam's mother's family was pure postoffice clerk all the way back.

Sam nodded apologetically and reined his horse back the proper couple of feet. "Thought I saw something odd," he explained. "Looked like an advance party on the side of the road—and I could have sworn they were wearing buffalo robes."

"Seminole don't wear buffalo robes, Sammy. Don't you remember your sophomore political science?"

"I never had any political science, Mr. Franklin: I was an engineering major. Digging around in ruins has always been my dish. But, from the little I know, I didn't *think* buffalo robes went with the Seminole. That's why I was—"

"Concentrate on the pack-horse," Jerry advised. "Negotiations are my job."

As he said this, he was unable to refrain from touching the pouch upon his breast with rippling fingertips. Inside it was his commission, carefully typed on one of the last precious sheets of official government stationery (and it was not one whit less official because the reverse side had been used years ago as a scribbled inter-office memo), and signed by the President himself. In ink!

The existence of such documents was important to a man in later life. He would have to hand it over, in all probability, during the conferences, but the commission to which it attested would be on file in the capitol up north. And, when his father died, and he took over one of the two hallowed Idaho seats, it would give him enough stature to make an attempt at membership on the Appropriations Committee. Or, for that matter, why not go the whole hog—the Rules Committee itself? No Senator Franklin had ever been a member of the Rules Committee. . . .

The two envoys knew they were on the outskirts of Trenton when they passed the first gangs of Jerseyites working to clear the road. Frightened faces glanced at them briefly, and quickly bent again to work. The gangs were working without any visible supervision. Evidently the Seminole felt that simple instructions were sufficient.

But as they rode into the blocks of neat ruins that was the city proper and still came across nobody more important than white men, another explanation began to occur to Jerry Franklin. This all had the look of a town still at war, but where were the combatants? Almost certainly on

the other side of Trenton, defending the Delaware River—that was the direction from which the new rulers of Trenton might fear attack—not from the north where there was only the United States of America.

But if that were so, who in the world could they be defending against? Across the Delaware to the south there was nothing but more Seminole. Was it possible—was it possible that the Seminole had at last fallen to fighting among themselves?

Or was it possible that Sam Rutherford had been right? Fantastic. Buffalo robes in Trenton! There should be no buffalo robes closer than a hundred miles westward, in Harrisburg.

But when they turned onto State Street, Jerry bit his lip in chagrin. Sam had seen correctly, which made him one up.

Scattered over the wide lawn of the gutted state capitol were dozens of wigwams. And the tall, dark men who sat impassively, or strode proudly among the wigwams, all wore buffalo robes. There was no need even to associate the paint on their faces with a remembered lecture in political science: these were Sioux.

So the information that had come drifting up to the government about the identity of the invader was totally inaccurate—as usual. Well, you couldn't expect communication miracles over this long a distance. But that inaccuracy made things difficult. It might invalidate his commission for one thing: his commission was addressed directly to Osceola VII, Ruler of All the Seminoles. And if Sam Rutherford thought this gave him a right to preen himself—

He looked back dangerously. No, Sam would give no trouble. Sam knew better than to dare an I-told-you-so. At his leader's look, the son of the Undersecretary of State dropped his eyes groundwards to immediate humility.

Satisfied, Jerry searched his memory for relevant data on recent political relationships with the Sioux. He couldn't recall much—just the provisions of the last two or three treaties. It would have to do.

He drew up before an important-looking warrior and carefully dismounted. You might get away with talking to a Seminole while mounted, but not the Sioux. The Sioux were very tender on matters of protocol with white men.

"We come in peace," he said to the warrior standing as impassively straight as the spear he held, as stiff and hard as the rifle on his back. "We come with a message of importance and many gifts to your chief. We come from New York, the home of our chief." He thought a moment, then added: "You know, The Great White Father?"

Immediately, he was sorry for the addition. The warrior chuckled briefly; his eyes lit up with a lightning-stroke of mirth. Then his face was expressionless again, and serenely dignified as befitted a man who had counted coup many times.

"Yes," he said. "I have heard of him. Who has not heard of the wealth and power and far dominions of The Great White Father? Come. I will take you to our chief. Walk behind me, white man."

Jerry motioned Sam Rutherford to wait.

At the entrance to a large expensively decorated tent, the Indian stood aside and casually indicated that Jerry should enter.

It was dim inside, but the illumination was rich enough to take Jerry's breath away. Oil lamps! Three of them! These people lived well.

A century ago, before the whole world had gone smash in the last big war, his people had owned plenty of oil lamps themselves. Better than oil lamps, perhaps, if one could believe the stories the engineers told around the evening fires. Such stories were pleasant to hear, but they were glories of the distant past. Like the stories of overflowing granaries and chock-full supermarkets, they made you proud of the history of your people, but they did nothing for you now. They made your mouth water, but they didn't feed you.

The Indians whose tribal organization had been the first to adjust to the new conditions, in the all-important present, the Indians had the granaries, the Indians had the oil lamps. And the Indians . . .

There were two nervous white men serving food to the group squatting on the floor. An old man, the chief, with a carved, chunky body. Three warriors, one of them surprisingly young for council. And a middle-aged Negro, wearing the same bound-on rags as Franklin, except that they looked a little newer, a little cleaner.

Jerry bowed low before the chief, spreading his arms apart, palms down.

"I come from New York, from our chief," he mumbled. In spite of himself, he was more than a little frightened. He wished he knew their names so that he could relate their names to specific events. Although he knew what their names would be like—approximately. The Sioux, the Seminole, all the Indian tribes renaissance in power and numbers, all bore names garlanded with anachronism. That queer mixture of several levels of the past, overlaid always with the cocky, expanding present. Like the rifles *and* the spears, one for the reality of fighting, the other for the symbol that was more important than the reality. Like the use of wigwams on campaign, when, according to the rumors that drifted smokily across country, their slave artisans could now build the meanest Indian noble a damp-free, draft-proof dwelling such as the President of the United States, lying on his special straw pallet, did not dream about. Like paint-spattered faces peering through newly re-invented, crude microscopes. What had microscopes been like? Jerry tried to remember the Engineering Survey Course he'd taken in his freshman year—and drew a blank. All the same, the Indians were so queer, *and* so awesome. Sometimes you thought that destiny had meant them to be conquerors, with a conqueror's careless inconsistency. Sometimes . . .

He noticed that they were waiting for him to continue. "From our chief," he repeated hurriedly. "I come with a message of importance and many gifts."

"Eat with us," the old man said. "Then you will give up your gifts and your message."

Gratefully, Jerry squatted on the ground a short distance from them. He was hungry, and among the fruit in the bowls he had seen something that must be an orange. He had heard so many arguments about what oranges tasted like!

After a while, the old man said, "I am Chief Three Hydrogen Bombs. This"—pointing to the young man—"is my son, Makes Much Radiation. And this"—pointing to the middle-aged Negro—"is a sort of compatriot of yours."

At Jerry's questioning look, and the chief's raised finger of permission, the Negro explained. "Sylvester Thomas. Ambassador to the Sioux from the Confederate States of America."

"The Confederacy? She's still alive? We heard ten years ago—"

"The Confederacy is very much alive, sir. The Western Confederacy that is, with its capital at Jackson, Mississippi. The Eastern Confederacy, the one centered at Richmond, Virginia, did go down under the Seminole. We have been more fortunate. The Arapahoe, the Cheyenne, and—" with a nod to the chief—"especially the Sioux, if I may say so, sir, have been very kind to us. They allow us to live in peace, so long as we till the soil quietly and pay our tithes."

"Then would you know, Mr. Thomas—" Jerry began eagerly. "That it . . . the Lone Star Republic—Texas—It is possible that Texas, too . . .?"

Mr. Thomas looked at the floor of the wigwam unhappily. "Alas, my good sir, The Republic of the Lone Star Flag fell before the Kiowa and the Comanche long years ago when I was still a small boy. I don't remember the exact date, but I do know it was before even the last of California was annexed by the Apache and the Navajo, and well before the nation of the Mormons under the august leadership of—"

Makes Much Radiation shifted his shoulders back and forth and flexed his arm muscles. "All this talk," he growled. "Paleface talk. Makes me tired."

"Mr. Thomas is not a paleface," his father told him sharply. "Show respect! He's our guest and an accredited ambassador—you're not to use a word like paleface in his presence!"

One of the other, older warriors near the chief spoke up. "In the old days, in the days of the heroes, a boy of Makes Much Radiation's age would not dare raise his voice in council before his father. Certainly not to say the things he just has. I cite as reference, for those interested, Robert's Lowie's definite volume. *The Crow Indians*, and Lesser's fine

piece of anthropological insight, *Three Types of Siouan Kinship*. Now, whereas we have not yet been able to reconstruct a Siouan kinship pattern on the classic model described by Lesser, we have developed a working arrangement that—"

"The trouble with you, Bright Book Jacket," the warrior on his left broke in, "is that you're too much of a classicist. You're always trying to live in the Golden Age instead of the present, and a Golden Age that really has little to do with the Sioux. Oh, I'll admit that we're as much Dacotan as the Crow, from the linguist's point of view at any rate, and that, superficially, what applies to the Crow should apply to us. But what happens when we quote Lowie in so many words and try to bring his precepts into daily life?"

"Enough," the chief announced. "Enough, Hangs A Tale. And you, too, Bright Book Jacket—enough, enough! These are private-tribal matters. Though they do serve to remind us that the paleface was once great before he became sick and corrupt and frightened. These men whose holy books teach us the lost art of living like Sioux, men like Lesser, men like Robert H. Lowie, were not these men palefaces? And in memory of them should we not show tolerance?"

"A-ah!" said Makes Much Radiation impatiently. "As far as I'm concerned, the only good palefaces are dead. And that's that." He thought a bit. "Except their women. Paleface women are fun when you're a long way from home and feel like raising a little hell."

Chief Three Hydrogen Bombs glared his son into silence. Then he turned to Jerry Franklin. "Your message and your gifts. First your message."

"No, Chief," Bright Book Jacket told him respectfully but definitely. "First the gifts. *Then* the message. That's the way it was done."

"I'll have to get them. Be right back." Jerry walked out of the tent backwards and ran to where Sam Rutherford had tethered the horses. "The presents," he said urgently. "The presents for the chief."

The two of them tore at the pack straps. With his arms loaded, Jerry returned through the warriors who had assembled to watch their activity with quiet arrogance. He entered the tent, set the gifts on the ground and bowed low again.

"Bright beads for the chief," he said, handing over two star sapphires and a large white diamond, the best that the engineers had evacuated from the ruins of New York in the past ten years.

"Cloth for the chief," he said, handing over a bolt of linen and a bolt of wool, spun and loomed in New Hampshire especially for this occasion and painfully, expensively carted to New York.

"Pretty toys for the chief," he said, handing over a large, only slightly rusty alarm clock and a precious typewriter, both of them put in operating order by batteries of engineers and artisans working in tandem (the

engineers interpreting the brittle old documents to the artisans) for two and a half months.

"Weapons for the chief," he said, handing over a beautifully decorated cavalry saber, the prized hereditary possession of the Chief of Staff of the United States Air Force, who had protested its requisitioning most bitterly ("Damn it all, Mr. President, do you expect me to fight these Indians with my bare hands?"—"No, I don't, Johnny, but I'm sure you can pick up one just as good from one of your eager junior officers").

Three Hydrogen Bombs examined the gifts, particularly the typewriter, with some interest. Then he solemnly distributed them among the members of his council, keeping only the typewriter and one of the sapphires for himself. The sword he gave to his son.

Makes Much Radiation tapped the steel with his fingernail. "Not so much," he stated. "Not-so-much. Mr. Thomas came up with better stuff than this from the Confederate States of America for my sister's puberty ceremony." He tossed the saber negligently to the ground. "But what can you expect from a bunch of lazy, good-for-nothing whiteskin stinkards?"

When he heard the last word, Jerry Franklin went rigid. That meant he'd have to fight Makes Much Radiation—and the prospect scared him right down to the wet hairs on his legs. The alternative was losing face completely among the Sioux.

"Stinkard!" was a term from the Natchez system and was applied these days indiscriminately to all white men bound to field or factory under their aristocratic Indian overlords. A "stinkard" was something lower than a serf, whose one value was that his toil gave his masters the leisure to engage in the activities of full manhood: hunting, fighting, thinking.

If you let someone call you a stinkard and didn't kill him, why, then you *were* a stinkard—and that was all there was to it.

"I am an accredited representative of the United States of America," Jerry said slowly and distinctly, "and the oldest son of the Senator from Idaho. When my father dies, I will sit in the Senate in his place. I am a free-born man, high in the councils of my nation, and anyone who calls me a stinkard is a rotten, no-good foul-mouthed liar!"

There—it was done. He waited as Makes Much Radiation rose to his feet. He noted with dismay the well-fed, well-muscled sleekness of the young warrior. He wouldn't have a chance against him. Not in hand-to-hand combat—which was the way it would be.

Makes Much Radiation picked up the sword and pointed it at Jerry Franklin. "I could chop you in half right now like a fat onion," he observed. "Or I could go into a ring with you knife to knife and cut your belly open. I've fought and killed Seminole, I've fought Apache, I've even fought and killed Comanche. But I've never dirtied my hands

with paleface blood, and I leave such simple butchery to the overseers of our estates. Father, I'll be outside until the lodge is clean again." Then he threw the sword ringingly at Jerry's feet and walked out.

Just before he left, he stopped, and remarked over his shoulder: "The oldest son of the Senator from Idaho! Idaho has been part of the estates of my mother's family for the past forty-five years! When will these romantic children stop playing games and start living in the world as is now?"

"My son," the old chief murmured. "Younger generation. A bit wild. Highly intolerant. But he means well. Really does. Means well."

He signaled to the white serfs who brought over a large chest covered with great splashes of color.

While the chief rummaged in the chest, Jerry Franklin relaxed inch by inch. It was almost too good to be true: he wouldn't have to fight Makes Much Ration, and he hadn't lost face. All things considered, the whole business had turned out very well indeed.

And as for that last comment—well, why expect an Indian to understand about things like tradition and the glory that could reside forever in a symbol? When his father stood up under the cracked roof of Madison Square Gardens and roared across to the Vice President of the United States: "The people of the sovereign state of Idaho will never and can never in all conscience consent to a tax on potatoes. From time immemorial, potatoes have been associated with Idaho, potatoes have been the pride of Idaho. The people of Boise say *no* to a tax on potatoes, the people of Pocatello say *no* to a tax on potatoes, the very rolling farmlands of the Gem of the Mountain say *no, never*, a thousand times *no*, to a tax on potatoes!"—when his father spoke like that, he was speaking for the people of Boise and Pocatello. Not the crushed Boise or desolate Pocatello of today, true, but the magnificent cities as they had been of yore . . . and the rich farms on either side of the Snake River. . . . And Sun Valley, Moscow, Idaho Falls, American Falls, Weiser, Grangeville, Twin Falls. . . .

"We did not expect you, so we have not many gifts to offer in return," Three Hydrogen Bombs was explaining. "However, there is just one small thing. For you."

Jerry gasped as he took it. It was a pistol, a real, brand-new pistol! And a small box of cartridges. Made in one of the Sioux slave workshops of the middle west that he had heard about. But to hold it in his hand, and to know that it belonged to him!

It was a Crazy Horse forty-five, and, according to all reports, far superior to the Apache weapon that had so long dominated the West, the Geronimo thirty-two. This was a weapon a General of the Armies, a President of the United States, might never hope to own—and it was his!

"I don't know how— Really, I—I—"

"That's all right," the chief told him genially. "Really it is. My son would not approve of giving firearms to palefaces, but I feel that palefaces are like other people—It's the individual that counts. You look like a responsible man for a paleface: I'm sure you'll use the pistol wisely. Now your message."

Jerry collected his faculties and opened the pouch that hung from his neck. Reverently, he extracted the precious document and presented it to the chief.

Three Hydrogen Bombs read it quickly and passed it to his warriors. The last one to get it, Bright Book Jacket, wadded it up into a ball and tossed it back at the white man.

"Bad penmanship," he said. "And 'receive' is spelled three different ways. The rule is: 'i before e, except after c.' But what does it have to do with us? It's addressed to the Seminole chief, Osceola VII, requesting him to order his warriors back to the southern bank of the Delaware River, or to return the hostage given him by the Government of the United States as an earnest of good will and peaceful intentions. We're not Seminole: why show it to us?"

As Jerry Franklin smoothed out the wrinkles in the paper with painful care and replaced the document in his pouch, the confederate ambassador, Sylvester Thomas, spoke up. "I think I might explain," he suggested, glancing inquiringly from face to face. "If you gentlemen don't mind...? It is obvious that the United States Government has heard that an Indian tribe finally crossed the Delaware at this point, and assumed it was the Seminole. The last movement of the Seminole, you will recall, was to Philadelphia, forcing the evacuation of the capitol once more and its transfer to New York City. It was a natural mistake: the communications of the American States, whether Confederate or United—" a small, coughing, diplomatic laugh here—"have not been as good as might have been expected in recent years. It is quite evident that neither this young man nor the government he represents so ably and so well, had any idea that the Sioux had decided to steal a march on his majesty, Osceola VII, and cross the Delaware at Lambertville."

"That's right," Jerry broke in eagerly. "That's exactly right. And now, as the accredited emissary of the President of the United States, it is my duty formally to request that the Sioux nation honor the treaty of eleven years ago as well as the treaty of fifteen—I *think* it was fifteen—years ago, and retire once more behind the banks of the Susquehanna River. I must remind you that when we retired from Pittsburgh, Altoona and Johnstown, you swore that the Sioux would take no more land from us and would protect us in the little we had left. I am certain that the Sioux want to be known as a nation that keeps its promises."

Three Hydrogen Bombs glanced questioningly at the faces of Bright

Book Jacket and Hangs A Tale. Then he leaned forward and placed his elbows on his crossed legs. "You speak well, young man," he commented. "You are a credit to your chief. . . . Now, then. Of course the Sioux want to be known as a nation that honors its treaties and keeps its promises. And so forth and so forth. But we have an expanding population. You don't have an expanding population. We need more land. You don't use most of the land you have. Should we sit by and see the land go to waste—worst yet, should we see it acquired by the Seminole who already rule a domain stretching from Philadelphia to Key West? Be reasonable. You can retire—to other places. You have most of New England left and a large part of New York State. Surely you can afford to give up New Jersey."

In spite of himself, in spite of his ambassadorial position, Jerry Franklin began yelling. All of a sudden it was too much. It was one thing to shrug your shoulders uphappily back home in the blunted ruins of New York, but here on the spot where the process was actually taking place—no, it was too much.

"What else can we afford to give up? Where else can we retire to? There's nothing left of the United States of America but a handful of square miles, and still we're supposed to move back! In the time of my forefathers, we were a great nation, we stretched from ocean to ocean, so say the legends of my people, and now we are huddled in a miserable corner of our land, starving, filthy, sick, dying and ashamed. In the North, we are oppressed by the Ojibwa and the Cree, we are pushed southward relentlessly by the Montaignais; in the South the Seminole climb up our land yard by yard; and in the West, the Sioux take a piece more of New Jersey, and the Cheyenne come up and nibble yet another slice out of Elmira and Buffalo. When will it stop—where are we to go?"

The old man shuffled uncomfortably at the agony in his voice. "It *is* hard; mind you, I don't deny that it *is* hard. But facts are facts, and weaker peoples always go to the wall. . . . Now, as to the rest of your mission. If we don't retire as you suggest, you're supposed to ask for the return of your hostage. Sounds reasonable to me. You ought to get something out of it. However, I can't for the life of me remember a hostage. Do we have a hostage from you people?"

His head hanging, his body exhausted, Jerry muttered in misery, "Yes. All the Indian nations on our border have hostages. As earnest of our good will and peaceful intentions."

Bright Book Jacket snapped his fingers. "That girl. Sarah Cameron—Canton—What's-her-name."

Jerry looked up. "Calvin?" he asked. "Could it be *Calvin*? Sarah Calvin? The daughter of the Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court?"

"Sarah Calvin. That's the one. Been with us for five, six years. You remember, Chief? The girl your son's been playing around with?"

Three Hydrogen Bombs looked amazed. "Is *she* the hostage? I thought she was some paleface female he had imported from his plantations in Southern Ohio. Well, well, well. Makes Much Radiation is just a chip off the old block, no doubt about it." He became suddenly serious. "But that girl will never go back. She rather goes for Indian loving. Goes for it all the way. And she has the idea that my son will eventually marry her. Or some such."

He looked Jerry Franklin over. "Tell you what, my boy. Why don't you wait outside while we talk this over? And take the saber. Take it back with you. My son doesn't seem to want it."

Jerry wearily picked up the saber and trudged out of the wigwam.

Dully, uninterestedly, he noticed the band of Sioux warriors around Sam Rutherford and his horses. Then the group parted for a moment, and he saw Sam with a bottle in his hand. Tequila! The damned fool had let the Indians give him Tequila—he was drunk as a pig.

Didn't he know that white men couldn't drink, didn't dare drink? With every inch of their unthreatened arable land under cultivation for foodstuffs, they were all still on the edge of starvation. There was absolutely no room in their economy for such luxuries as intoxicating beverages—and no white man in the usual course of a lifetime got close to so much as a glassful of the stuff. Give him a whole bottle of Tequila and he was a stinking mess.

As Sam was now. He staggered back and forth in dipping semi-circles, holding the bottle by its neck and waving it idiotically. The Sioux chuckled, dug each other in the ribs and pointed. Sam vomited loosely down the rags upon his chest and belly, tried to take one more drink, and fell over backwards. The bottle continued to pour over his face until it was empty. He was snoring loudly. The Sioux shook their heads, made grimaces of distaste, and walked away.

Jerry looked on and nursed the pain in his heart. Where could they go? What could they do? And what difference did it make? Might as well be as drunk as Sammy there. At least you wouldn't be able to feel.

He looked at the saber now in one hand, the bright new pistol in the other. Logically, he should throw them away. Wasn't it ridiculous when you came right down to it, wasn't it pathetic—a white man carrying weapons?

Sylvester Thomas came out of the tent. "Get your horses ready, my dear sir," he whispered. "Be prepared to ride as soon as I come back. Hurry!"

The young man slouched over to the horses and followed instructions—might as well do that as anything else. Ride where? Do what?

He lifted Sam Rutherford up and tied him upon his horse. Go back

home? Back to the great, the powerful, the respected, capitol of what had once been the United States of America?

Thomas came back with a bound and gagged girl in his grasp. She wriggled madly. Her eyes crackled with anger and rebellion. She kept trying to kick the Confederate Ambassador.

She wore the rich robes of an Indian princess. Her hair was braided in the style currently fashionable among Sioux women. And her face had been stained carefully with some darkish dye.

Sarah Calvin. The daughter of the Chief Justice. They tied her to the pack horse.

"Chief Three Hydrogen Bombs," the Negro explained. "He feels his son plays around too much with paleface females. He wants this one out of the way. The boy has to settle down, prepare for the responsibilities of chieftainship. This may help. And listen, the old man likes you. He told me to tell you something."

"I'm grateful. I'm grateful for every favor, no matter how small, how humiliating."

Sylvester Thomas shook his head decisively. "Don't be bitter, young sir. If you want to go on living you have to be alert. And you can't be alert and bitter at the same time. . . . The Chief wants you to know there's no point in your going home. He couldn't say it openly in council, but the reason the Sioux moved in on Trenton has nothing to do with the Seminole on the other side. It has to do with the Ojibwa-Cree-Montaignais situation in the North. They've decided to take over the eastern seaboard—that includes what's left of your country. By this time, they're probably in Yonkers or the Bronx, somewhere inside New York City. In a matter of hours, your government will no longer be in existence. The Chief had advance word of this and felt it necessary for the Sioux to establish some sort of bridgehead on the coast before matters were permanently stabilized. By occupying new Jersey he is preventing an Ojibwa-Seminole junction. But he likes you, as I said, and wants you warned against going home.

"Fine. But where *do* I go? Up a rain cloud? Down a well?"

"No," Thomas admitted without smiling. He hoisted Jerry up on his horse. "You might come back with me to the Confederacy—" He paused, and when Jerry's sullen expression did not change, he went on, "Well, then, may I suggest—and mind you, this is my advice, not the Chief's—head straight out to Asbury Park. It's not far away—you can make it in reasonable time if you ride hard. According to reports I've overheard, there should be units of the United States Navy there, the Tenth Fleet, to be exact."

"Tell me," Jerry asked, bending down. "Have you heard any other news? Anything about the rest of the world? How has it been with these people—the Russkies, the Sovietskis, whatever they were called—the ones the United States had so much to do with years ago?"

"According to several of the chief's councillors, the Soviet Russians were having a good deal of difficulty with people called Tatars. I *think* they were called Tatars. But, my good sir, you should be on your way."

Jerry leaned down further and grasped his hand. "Thanks," he said. "You've gone to a lot of trouble for me. I'm grateful."

"That's quite all right," said Mr. Thomas earnestly. "After all, by the rocket's red glare, and all that. We were a single nation once."

Jerry moved off, leading the other two horses. He set a fast pace, exercising the minimum of caution made necessary by the condition of the road. By the time they reached Route 33, Sam Rutherford, though not altogether sober or well, was able to sit in his saddle. They could then untie Sarah Calvin and ride with her between them.

She cursed and wept. "Filthy paleface! Foul, ugly, stinking white-skins! I'm an Indian, can't you see I'm an Indian? My skin isn't white—it's brown, brown!"

They kept riding.

Asbury Park was a dismal clutter of rags and confusion and refugees. There were refugees from the north, from Perth Amboy, from as far as Newark. There were refugees from Princetown in the west, flying before the Sioux invasion. And from the south, from Atlantic City—even unbelievably, from distant Camden—were still other refugees, with stories of a sudden Seminole attack, an attempt to flank the armies of Three Hydrogen Bombs.

The three horses were stared at enviously, even in their lathered, exhausted condition. They represented food to the hungry, the fastest transportation possible to the fearful. Jerry found the saber very useful. And the pistol was even better—it had only to be exhibited. Few of these people had ever seen a pistol in action: they had a mighty, superstitious fear of firearms. . . .

With this fact discovered, Jerry kept the pistol out nakedly in his right hand when he walked into the United States Naval Depot on the beach at Asbury Park. Sam Rutherford was at his side; Sarah Calvin walked sobbing behind.

He announced their family backgrounds to Admiral Milton Chester. The son of the Undersecretary of State. The daughter of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. The oldest son of the Senator from Idaho. "And now. Do you recognize the authority of this document?"

Admiral Chester read the wrinkled commission slowly, spelling out the harder words to himself. He twisted his head respectfully when he had finished, looking first at the seal of the United States on the paper before him, and then at the glittering pistol in Jerry's hand.

"Yes," he said at last. "I recognize its authority. Is that a real pistol?"

Jerry nodded. "A Crazy Horse forty-five. The latest. *How* do you recognize its authority?"

The admiral spread his hands. "Everything is confused out here. The latest word I've received is that there are Ojibwa warriors in Manhattan—that there is no longer any United States Government. And yet this—" he bent over the document once more—"this is a commission by the President himself, appointing you full plenipotentiary. To the Seminole, of course. But full plenipotentiary. The last official appointment, to the best of my knowledge, of the President of the United States of America."

He reached forward and touched the pistol in Jerry Franklin's hand cautiously and inquiringly. He nodded to himself, as if he'd come to a decision. He stood up, and saluted with a flourish.

"I hereby recognize you as the last legal authority of the United States Government. And I place my fleet at your disposal."

"Good." Jerry stuck the pistol in his belt. He pointed with the saber. "Do you have enough food and water for a long voyage?"

"No, sir," Admiral Chester said. "But that can be arranged in a few hours at most. May I escort you aboard, sir?"

He gestured proudly down the beach and past the surf to where the three, forty-five foot, gaff-rigged schooners rode at anchor. "The United States Tenth Fleet, sir. Awaiting your orders."

Hours later when the three vessels were standing out to sea, the admiral came to the cramped main cabin where Jerry Franklin was resting. Sam Rutherford and Sarah Calvin were asleep in the bunks above.

"And the orders, sir . . .?"

Jerry Franklin walked out on the narrow deck, looked up at the taut, patched sails. "Sail east."

"East, sir?" *Due east?*"

"Due east all the way. To the fabled lands of Europe. To a place where a white man can stand at last on his own two legs. Where he need not fear persecution. Where he need not fear slavery. Sail east, Admiral, until we discover a new and hopeful world—a world of freedom!"



*A no-quarter interstellar war, fought out
in a quiet chapel, with Earth's champions
a tired middle-aged nun and a long-dead
philosopher—*

a demon at devotions

By Jane Roberts

MOTHER SUPERIOR drew out her rosary from the folds of her heavy habit. The touch of the small black beads was comforting even if she was not thinking much about the words. It wasn't really right to pray with only half a mind, but God helps those who help themselves and maybe if she thought about things for awhile here in the peaceful chapel, she'd straighten herself out.

Something certainly had set her nerves on edge all week. Of course, the Bishop was arriving for the procession on Sunday. But that could hardly be the reason—having already been honored with the good Bishop's presence at Confirmation time for the past five years, she wasn't apt to let his arrival at a plain procession bother her.

Nonetheless, she had been out of sorts . . . she couldn't remember ever being so nervous and jumpy before. She wasn't even saying the rosary properly. Either her mind went too far ahead of her lips, or lagged behind, so that while her lips were still muttering the Glory Be, her mind was still on the last Hail Mary.

Maybe she'd feel better if she just sat back and relaxed for a moment. Her knees were tired and the vigil lights made her dizzy. Light then dark. Light then dark.

What was that? Had she heard something? What a curious feeling—like the time she'd passed out after a penicillin shot. Like bees in your head. Perhaps she was really sick. But the buzzing in her head was forming words. Or was it? What was that? I am Alzhia . . . Arzia?

Was it Latin, Greek? There, she had heard it. I am Lord of something or other. It sounded like Alphiz.

Good heavens. Wasn't there a demon by that name? Horrified, her eyes flew open. *Paradise Lost*. They were all listed there. Ashtaroth, Astarte, Orsirir . . . no, she was sure it began with an A. What on earth would she say if it was a demon? "Get thee behind me Satan," sounded terribly dramatic—but then, people aren't plagued by demons every day, either.

Of course, it might very well be a vision. How could you really tell the difference? It was outrageous, really, the similarity between the names of angels and demons. Still, she'd better kneel down and fold her hands just in case.

"Do you hear me? Can you understand?"

Well, that was plain enough. "Yes," she murmured weakly. Maybe she was a schizophrenic.

"I am Lord of Alpha Seven."

"You are who?" She had to whisper. The nuns would be shocked if they heard voices speaking out loud in the chapel.

"I am the lord of Alpha Seven. We have observed your planet and are coming to your assistance."

Well this was a fine kettle of fish. Was he an angel or a devil?

"I repeat. I am Lord of Alpha Seven. We are coming to your assistance. We have carefully screened all the minority groups on your planet, and have finally chosen the nuns, since they are the most enslaved, and no other defender has arisen to agitate for their freedom."

The world was surely coming to an end for her. "Hail Mary full of grace, the Lord is with thee . . ."

"Did you hear me?"

Did she hear him? How could she help it? The voice sounded as if were coming from her own brain.

"Yes, I hear you."

"The isolation of your existence, the dark edifices in which you are imprisoned, the black clothing which your kind is forced to wear as a symbol of your status—all these things are known to us. We have decided to take up your cause as if it were our own."

Was the chapel growing darker or was it her imagination? Surely it was. She was being besieged by demons for her pride and sinfulness. Hadn't her confessor warned her against the sin of pride? And she had dared to think of visions!

"There is nothing to fear. Only listen and follow my directions."

See that? How it had twisted her words.

"Not you. I'm not praying to you." She had to get herself under control. Obviously the voice was her pagan id. The only thing to do was listen and pray for guidance. Perhaps God would show her the

way. But how on earth did you convince your own subconscious of its error?

The voice was impatient now. "Do you understand? This is a momentous occasion. I am the Lord . . ."

The lord! Did he think . . . did it think it was . . . "Do you mean to say you're trying to tell me you're God?" She might as well know the worst right away.

"To all intents and purposes, yes, I am."

"You're convinced?" This was ridiculous—her id must have a god complex.

"The time I have allotted for this interview does not include this idiotic questioning. If there is any interrogation I will initiate it. You seem unaware that it is within my power to annihilate your whole planet. I can easily control it without the assistance of you and your kind. My people are logical, and it is logical that we invade your planet since you are defenceless and weaker than ourselves. Abused minority groups are always good weapons—but not indispensable, and your impertinent attitude is not to your advantage."

"But I need time . . ." It was foolish not to denounce the voice immediately, but . . .

"My psychological experts inform me that hesitancy on your part is natural in view of the fact that this is your planet's first experience in inter-stellar communication. But I cannot wait forever for your answer. Even now my forces are preparing for the invasion, and outside my dome, the commanders are assembling. . . . Now then, if you and the other nuns carry out my orders, I will install you as proxy rulers of your planet—if not you will be treated as any subjugated people. What is your decision?"

If only she weren't so confused. "There are some things I don't understand. Will you answer me if I ask some questions?"

"I approve your discretion. It is always safer to have a full picture. But speak quickly."

"Are you infinite? Do you have a beginning in time?"

"Of course I have a beginning. My life span is immeasurably longer than your own, but in many respects our species are much alike. There is no reason to fear our alienness."

"But you aren't infinite?"

"No, I am not."

Oh God bless St. Aquinas. "Then you are not God."

"You are in no position to doubt my authority."

"Well you don't have to snap at me. For that matter, I don't like your tone either. And furthermore, we nothings, as you call us, are 'imprisoned' in our converts by our own will, and our habits distinguish us from all others as being the handmaidens of the true God." There

had to be an end to this sometime. And there wasn't any use in taking impertinence from her own unconscious.

"Your diplomacy is most clever. I congratulate you. The data I received on your group was incorrect, I gather. It is not often I am caught unaware. . . . But how do I know what you say is true, and not, forgive me, the fabrications of a crafty mind to avoid destruction? You say you are the emissary of another planetary lord, and not merely the leader of a subjugated minority?"

Well it was true wasn't it? "Yes."

"Can you prove it?"

"Yes. First of all, the God I follow is the only God, and His existence is self-evident—"

"Self-evident? I rather enjoy this match of wits. Power brings its loneliness and no one dares converse with me on these terms on my own planet. Nevertheless your logic is ridiculously childish, as I should have expected. It is true that *my* existence is self-evident since I am speaking to you, but surely the thundering voice of your own god is suspiciously silent? I say that there is no such god, so his existence is *not* self-evident."

"If you're not worried about it, then why are you wasting your time talking, while your forces are supposedly only waiting your word to destroy me?" There. That retort should quiet him some. But of course if it was her id, it would know Aquinas too.

"It amuses me. And I wonder why you are so unconcerned about the fate of your planet; you seem oddly unafraid of arousing my displeasure, though the future of your race is utterly dependent upon my wish. Were I not suspicious of your motives, the invasion would already be under way."

"My God will defend me."

"Your god! Creature! where is he? You say he is self-evident—certainly not to me. But if so, his existence can be demonstrated through his effects, but effects are finite and cannot be attributed to an infinite being. Yet you say he is infinite. So he cannot be demonstrated at all."

After all, this was too much. "Very well, then, begin your invasion. But let me tell you that God stands guard over our minds and spirits and will not permit harm to come to us."

"He will not? Then refute my argument."

"Did you think I couldn't? First of all, when an effect is better known than its cause, we proceed from an effect to the cause itself; and since every effect depends upon its cause, if the effect exists, the cause exists . . . Therefore the existence of God is proven through those effects with which we are familiar." God help her. It was Aquinas almost word for word.

"Effects? I don't admit of any. If your God's effects are so far reaching, surely he is here on Alpha Seven? Well I assure you he is not. Pretenders are not dealt with kindly here."

"He certainly is on Alpha, or whenever it is you are. But your eyes

are clouded by ignorance so that you are not aware of His presence. Haven't you any religion at all? Haven't you any idea how you came into being in the first place?"

"Of course not. The wise are concerned only with things that are. To confuse the brain with how the process began is only nonsense."

"Listen, do we agree that motion is the reduction of something from potentiality to actuality?"

"Creature, your persistence tires me. However—yes. So far I agree."

"Splendid. Now you must admit that nothing can be reduced from potentiality to actuality except from something already in a state of being. Whatever is moved must be moved by another. This is the prime mover, or God."

"I see. . . . Do you know, if your story were more believable, I would never believe it. I tend to feel, though, that it is too unbelievable to be fabricated—particularly by one of your species. Its real beauty lies in its very lack of proof—the only way to test its validity is to begin the invasion, which, if you are correct, would be to invite disaster. Where can I contact that god?"

"There isn't any need to. He hears everything we say."

"He does? My advisers gave me no reason to suspect telepathy. Nevertheless, tell him that I salute him, and compliment him on the shrewdness of his followers. . . . I am calling off the invasion—the wise do not take chances unless they know clearly what is involved. Assume your god of a welcome when he makes himself known on my planet. I suggest a meeting. . . . Perhaps, even, for diversion, I may contact *you* again."

"Oh, no!" Mother Superior shook her head vigorously. But the voice was silent.

Some time when she was less tired, she must attempt to decipher that invasion symbolism. Now, grateful for quiet and the end of her, she must believe, deserved ordeal, she dipped her finger daintily in the holy water font, and genuflected with strengthened humility.



George P. Elliott . . .

here tells of Earth
many years hence.
An exploratory
visit had been paid
to Venus, where the
native Venereans
were found to be
incredibly passive
but exuding a warm
sense of love . . .

now the Venereans
choose to repay
the visit—

*Nothing
But
Love*

AT the time, I was the officer in charge of the Navy base on a round atoll south of the Marshalls, Paraklu-lei (Para for short). There were thirty men under me, and two hundred natives on the atoll. My main activity was keeping peace between my men and the native husband and fathers. We were there to "hold ourselves in readiness"—which meant that we played a lot of poker, made love with all the women who would, sent in weather reports, refueled an occasional plane, and read bad stories. The native chief and I, between us just managed to keep peace. Not order—peace: nobody got killed.

My brother Jerry, a Navy chaplain, was visiting me at the time. Jerry and I were very fond of each other and always had been; we saw eye to eye on everything but religion. At least I used to think we saw eye to eye; now I am not so sure. I am a good enough officer, but I would rather be a lawyer, as I had intended, than a lieutenant. I am thirty, married, six feet tall and rather vain of my hair. I was born and raised in San Francisco, and I prefer Irish whiskey to Scotch. There is in fact nothing notable about me at all, except that chance put me in command of Para during May of last year. But then, chance is enough: it puts kings on thrones.

The first of the falling stars we did not see but only heard about over the radio. It landed at nine o'clock at night, some 450 miles to the east of us. The plane that reported it was within fifteen

miles of where it plunged into the sea and said that it was huge and white. A pleasant relief from rumors of war.

The second was about 300 miles to the east of us, and fell at 9:45. Two of the men coming home from the native village saw it like a pencil mark down to the horizon. The plane that had reported the first one reported this one, too. The third was just 150 miles to the east, in a line with the first two, and we all saw it. It fell at 10:30, within ten miles of the *Samuel Howe*, a tanker. The *Samuel Howe* said that the falling star looked enormous and white-hot, but that it made no perceptible noise and created no disturbance in the water as they had expected.

At 11:15, the fourth one, if there was any logic to these events, might be expected to land right on us. At least that's what the men thought, and though it may have been sufficiently superstitious of me it's what I thought too.

Ashton, the radioman, demonstrated to me—he was nuts about statistics—that the probability of another star falling in this pattern was so slight as to be nil; the exponent of his number was itself over a billion. I told him that the probability of three stars falling in this pattern was already nil enough to impress me, yet they had up and done it; in a case like this I'd put as much trust in a rabbit's foot as a number. He looked disgusted with me and went off hugging his exponent to keep him warm.

Jerry argued that Ashton was right. The cause of this phenomenon, he said, was either natural or divine. If it was natural then Ashton was obviously correct and we had nothing to worry about. And it could scarcely be divine, for why should God waste his signs and miracles like this in the middle of the Pacific? What can three shooting stars in a row signify? I agreed: they didn't signify a thing; and agreed: it was statistically as impossible that a fourth meteorite should come along hitting us as that the sun should blow up tomorrow. All the same, at 11:05, I ordered Ashton and Jerry into the air-raid shelters with everyone else—the men were already there. We spent a bad half hour there. Nothing happened.

Nothing happened, yet we weren't unprepared for the nude little men that came in from the sea the next morning. For as we talked into the night, it seemed to us somehow that neither the subhuman nor the superhuman explanations of these falling stars was right. Of course man had never done anything on such a scale that we knew of. Still if neither God nor chance explained them, then what was left but men? Or something like men. Something like those small, pallid, clawhanded creatures of Venus whom we had seen pictures of in *Life* magazine, years before. The Americans who had made up the second expedition to Venus had failed to return, after eight years. What did we know of Venereans except what the Security Board had let us read about in

magazines, and what may the Board may not have withheld? And these "shooting stars" were less disturbing if rational creatures caused them. After all, when statistical probability goes on the rampage, where are you? And you never did know for sure where you were with God. Now, men, or rational Venereans even, have limits; and whatever harm they may do, still you can understand it—you're like that yourself in a way.

That morning I was in the radio room with Ashton having a cup of coffee. He had made his weather report and was chatting with Samoa about the occurrences of last night. He was still mighty proud of that exponent of his. Neither of us seemed nervous or tense, but we were laughing too much. When a bug-eyed sailor burst in without knocking, Ashton jumped like a jack-in-the-box; and when he blurted out the business of the twelve little men walking on the water, neither of us said he was crazy but ran out to look. Samoa, who had heard him, was squawking after us like a mad goose as we ran out.

There they were all right, hairless and four feet tall, bobbing up and down as they trudged over the waves. They were close to shore by the time we got there, smiling and holding their arms out to us in greeting. They had a good deal of trouble clambering across the breakers, which were higher than they, but they made it. We were all so frozen with amazement that none of us thought to shoot them until it was too late. Too late, because by the time they were running up the beach towards us, defenseless and soft-looking and the color of underlog bugs, we could not have shot them if we had wanted to. The point is, of course, we didn't want to.

For they behaved as the first expedition to Venus had said they behaved: they suffused us with a feeling of well-being and joy and tenderness. A general sort of emotion, not about anything in especial . . . like a young fellow on the first day of spring ready to fall in love. Well, though I knew I should have ordered them destroyed (in a way I knew it), I just stood there, with Jerry and Ashton and all my men, and let those smiling visitors play on our emotions as though we were pianos.

What they told us was like what music says. On a perpetual base of this feeling of love, sometimes surging up and overwhelming everything else, they composed emotions of hatred mixed with sorrow; forebodings of disaster; pride as in a deed well done and at the same time regret that it was not done perfectly; spasms of murderous hostility suddenly cut short by remorse and pity; suspiciousness and dread of the twelve visitors themselves, which turned first into guilt and finally into a great coda of loving forgiveness of them. However any of us described our feelings afterwards, we all agreed on the last—we *forgave* them joyously, as though they had damaged us greatly but for our own

good. A most perplexing feeling to experience, much less to try to communicate, being, as it were, uncircumstanced.

When, after fifteen or twenty minutes, they had finished, they clasped their claws in farewell and walked back over the breakers onto the sea. It was not till they were a hundred yards out from shore that I was able to do my duty. I ordered the men to open fire on them with whatever weapons they had. Our best solvator-shot aimed, fired, and apparently missed them all. They lifted their arms in farewell again, went down into the trough of a wave, and did not reappear.

Samoa was still on the radio. Jerry and Ashton and I, all of us confused and incoherent, told a reporter on the Samoa end what had happened. He informed the rest of the world that same morning of what we had told him.

The Russians laughed sarcastically at our low joke. The American newspapers played it up as a particularly wild flying-saucer story. The British played us dead-pan straight. We had the distinction, until 11:00 that night, of being the most laughed-at people in the world. Some of my men became so outraged at the incredulity of the rest of the world that they would not listen to the radio at all. Most of us, however, pretending to understand how it was that no one would believe us, laughed too; besides, even if our laughter was out of the wrong side of our mouths, it was a safeguard against thinking about what had happened to us that morning. Only Jerry thought about it, and it wasn't till later that he told us what conclusions he had reached.

Forgiveness? What had we to forgive them?

That night at eleven, without explosion or radiation, New York, Washington, Leningrad, and Moscow, and all the people in them, turned into plains of dust.

By 11:30 we knew about it. Ashton and I were alone in the control room.

"My god," said Ashton, "the war is on. I wonder who started it."

"They both started at the same time," I answered.

"Someone always starts wars. And new weapons no one even hinted at." Ashton leaped up from his chair and danced about the room. "You know, Chief, it's a great time to be alive. These are better than miracles. This is the real thing."

"But look, mah, 16 million people have been killed. And you dance."

"Oh sure. Somebody has to pay for progress. What's your kick? You weren't there."

I could find no word for expressing what I felt about him; I started to walk out.

But Jerry was at the door. He had been praying, and now he wanted news. We told him. He seemed to be not at all surprised.

"Well," he sighed. "Well, they had to do it. They will come back before they leave, and gain our forgiveness."

"Who?" I said irritably.

"The little fellows—?" said Ashton incredulously.

Jerry nodded. "We must love one another or die," he said, and bent his head in prayer.

Ashton and I looked at each other in horror for a moment.

"Four cities at the same time, and not even an explosion," said Ashton with awe.

"Jerry says they will come back," I said half to myself. "We must be prepared for them."

"What, sir!" said Ashton.

But I did not wait. If I had waited I might have started thinking how futile it was to do anything, and if I did nothing I might have allowed myself to speculate on what was happening, and that speculation I could not have survived sane. So I had the men work all night long setting up our searchlights and weapons in such spots as would command the beach for a quarter of a mile to either side of the place where the Venereans had first appeared. I tramped up and down the line keeping everyone keyed up and alert, keeping them full of coffee and fear, drilling into them precisely what they were to do.

One of the men, a machine gunner, objected that our monstrous visitors were immune to our weapons. Jerry had said they were apparitions, and Ashton that they had some sort of electronic bubble inside which kept them impervious to us. It didn't matter. We had to keep busy. I shouted the machine gunner down.

At dawn Ashton came out shaking with excitement. He had just heard from Samoa that Admiral Gregory was on his way down to us with some crack Intelligence Officers, who would be here by seven o'clock, and that the three top Soviet military men in the East, led by General Stock, were on their way from Vladivostok, in a jet. Jerry, he said, had prayed all night long. If Jerry had not been my brother, I am sure Ashton would have had some nasty crack to make; as it was, he looked at me carefully when he told me this. I tried to show no expression. Ashton vigorously approved of all my preparations: not because they would do any good, as he said, but because they would impress the brass. At that moment I loathed Ashton.

Well, at 6:35 a.m. the American brass came; Admiral Gregory gave a cursory glance at my preparations, and grunted approval of them. At 8:10 the Russians arrived. Then we held a conference in the control room. It was a tedious conference, partly because of the delays of translations and partly because nobody believed us. I told them briefly and accurately what I had already described. Ashton gave his interpretation—he sounded crackpot enough, I will admit. And Jerry gave them

his. This was complicated by the fact that the Russian translator didn't know what *miracle* meant (it seems to have been dropped from their vocabulary), and that Admiral Gregory thought Jerry preposterous. Gregory and Stock radioed orders for sumbarines to be sent to the spots where the shooting stars had already been observed to go into the sea.

And the air-raid siren howled. We all ran to the beach.

The twelve Venereans, pudgy and smiling, were waddling like fifty-year-old clubwomen toward us over the blue waves. I heard—with gratification—Admiral Gregory gasp and General Stock grunt something under his breath.

"They're no apparitions," said Ashton to Jerry. "You can't see through them."

But Jerry was on his knees already.

Then the men opened fire. With everything in the book. Salvators, depressors, machine guns, rifles, Murdlegatts and bazookas. The Paraklu chief threw a spear. The salvator man refused to give up as everyone else did when nothing came of our offensive. He had a frenzy of shooting, exhausting two cartridges of solvation. He even, at the last, as the Venereans were on the last breakers before us, solvated the breaker out from under them. They dropped down three or four feet, looked surprised, and came on. The brass was duly impressed. The solvator man went stark mad.

At first the little men tried the same technique as they had the day before. But the brass did not yield easily. So without warning they threw us off-balance by releasing the fiercest hatred in us, hatred of them only. Men turned purple with it. Their hands twitched to strangle the creatures. My legs ached with the desire to run at them and stamp them out. But none of us moved in inch; we were their pianos.

And then gradually our hating them became pleasant. We did not give up our hostility in the least—but we enjoyed it. We felt united in our hating and looked at one another, American, Russian, Paraklu, comrades in hating, loving comrades. So very pleasant did our hating become that finally we not only forgave the monsters from Venus for what they had done, we were grateful to them for having done it, for letting us hate them, for destroying our four cities, for uniting us against them. We were stunned by a paean of gratitude which finally dropped us all to our knees before our invading enemies, kneeling like Jerry but for reasons we did not understand and full of emotions we did not really approve of.

I remember that when I became aware they were gone, I found my face wet with tears, and that when I stood up, still crying, I threw my arms about the Russian translator as though he were a dear friend whom I had not seen for years, and he kissed me on both cheeks.

General Stock is one of the three military chiefs of Russia, just as Admiral Gregory is "The MacArthur of the Seas." Their words are so influential that their experience at Para last May has produced the alliance we all appreciate. There are strong forces in both Russia and America demanding an immediate return to our former hostility, but the four dusty wounds where those four great cities had been have been enough to counterbalance the reactionaries. Still, as everyone knows, we can't get along without some sort of war.

For a month after the second visitation, cruisers patrolled the areas where the shooting stars had gone down into the Pacific. The ocean is over four miles deep in that area. It is very hard to get anything to go down that far and then explode, but we managed to do it. We laid a thousand eggs in a week, making the area so radioactive that nothing can possibly be alive for many hundred cubic miles. Planes (UN) fly over the whole region day and night.

Jerry goes around preaching love; a few crazy people believe in him. In America there was an article about him in *Life*; alongside a man who claims that the world has already come to an end ("we're all in Purgatory now and only the chosen will go to Heaven, if you want to get there quick, just follow me"), there was Jerry, earnest in the memory of his vision. *We must love one another or die*; he still believes it.

The UN has outlawed in the strongest terms the weapon which destroyed the four cities, whatever it is, whoever used it. The memorials to those dead cities are, I am informed, to be simple and powerful: on the American memorial, a ferocious, screaming eagle about to strike, on the Russian, a ravaging bear.

On the whole, things have shaped up very well. The Russians, with a satellite umbrella and other devices, protect the Earth from invaders; we, concentrating on space-ships, are preparing an all-out assault on Venus. The Jerrys say we are mad; the Ashtons say that war with Venus is futile but that our endeavors will produce great advances in knowledge. I don't know: I want to get back to my law work and not have to think about the whole mess. In fact, I doubt if anybody really believes that we, in our present state, will be able to conquer the planet of love.

Yet, there is one thing I'm sure of, remembering the vast and beautiful gratitude I felt on the beach that morning last May: so long as we are united side by side against our enemy, he will not bother us again. What finer enemy could we have than this one, who lets us struggle against him to our hearts' content but punishes us when we ourselves begin to destroy one another . . . ?



THE MOON . . . beloved by sweethearts and lyric writers, this big question-mark may have already been answered by the time this tale appears in print !
Meanwhile, here is one solution by

A. Bertram
Chandler=
**CRITICAL
ANGLE**

WE were lucky to escape with our lives and for that reason, I suppose, we have no real cause for complaint. All the same, it hurts, this being regarded as vandals by the very people who should be most grateful to us. And it's not only the astronomers who have it in for us—every third rate versifier who ever wrote slushy lyrics for popular songs hates our guts; and if it ever does come to a shooting war with the Soviet Union, and we lose, I rather fear that Hank and I will head the list of American citizens to be liquidated without delay.

It was all far too much of a rush job, of course. There should have been rockets round the Moon, unmanned and manned. There should have been unmanned rockets landing on the Moon. The much advertised telemetering equipment should have been given a real work-out. But politics—and international politics at that—got tangled up with honest astronautics, and our scientists just had to do something really spectacular to save face.

They did.

Or we did.

And we got blamed.

It was the business of the Red Moon that started things off. The

Russian rocket, you will remember, was unmanned and carried as payload a few tons of bright scarlet powder. It was fitted with a proximity fuse, and had a demolition charge which would not only destroy the rocket but spread the powder over a large area of the Moon's face.

It worked all right.

There was no advance publicity. There were unconfirmed Press reports of *beeps* on the twenty megacycle band apparently heading Moonward. These were taken with a large grain of salt; everybody remembered the panic started by similar rumors in the past. And then, of course, there came the night of a full Moon when it was obvious to all the world that the Russians had done it. The red stain was big enough to be seen with the naked eye. It even—although this may have been due more to chance than to skill—looked like a Red Star.

So there it was, covering Copernicus and more, the glaring proof that the Russians had beaten us to it again. We of the Rocket Service had this to say about it—if we had been in existence earlier it wouldn't have happened. It was the Army's fault, the Navy's fault, or the fault of the Air Force. Now that we were the only body concerned with astronautics we should, in time, catch up.

In time . . .

That was the snag.

The Press demanded action *now*, if not before. Congress was unanimous in demanding to know just what we had done and were doing with our appropriations. The General was called to the White House for a stormy interview.

On his return he sent for Hank Williams and myself. We weren't as worried as we might have been when we received the summons. Generals don't bawl out lowly Lieutenants in person—besides, we had clear consciences.

Old Back Blast was sitting behind his desk when we were ushered into the presence. He did not get to his feet—even so, his eyes were on a level with ours. "Sit down!" he barked. We sat down. "H'm!" he grunted. "Perhaps you'd better stand. I don't feel that I should look down on you."

"Why shouldn't you, sir?" asked Hank. "After all, you're a General, and we're only Lieutenants."

"After all," said Back Blast, looking at us with an odd sort of expression, "I'm only a General, and you're the first men in the Moon."

"Five hundred miles straight up," said Hank, "doesn't make us the first men in the Moon."

"Don't argue!" roared the General. "If I say that you're the first men in the Moon, then you are. Or you will be."

"Unless the Russians—" I began to say.

"*Damn* the Russians. Look men, I'm offering you a chance that I'd sell my own soul for. But I'm too old and too big and too heavy. I'm

offering you the chance, you're the best two pilots I've got. Inside a week we can have MR-1 stripped of all her electronic gadgets and fitted out to carry a two man crew. Inside two weeks you can be planting the flag bang in the middle of that sanguinary red star."

"But the Russians—"

"I happen to know," he said coldly, "that the Russians are going about this according to all the rules. Their next stop will be a rocket round the Moon with telemetering equipment, cameras and the usual hapless hound. After that there'll be a manned rocket round the Moon. After that, perhaps, a landing. That's what we *should* be doing. But I'm convinced that MR-1 can make it, and with ample propellant for the return journey."

I looked at Hank and he looked at me. We both looked at Back Blast Bradley. He looked back at us.

"Well?" he asked. "Are you in it, or do I get Ferranti and Smith for the job?"

"We're in it," we said together.

Six days wasn't long for all we had to do. We told ourselves that the Wright brothers had flown without either theory or data on the principles of heavier than air flight to help them. We told ourselves that we had books full of theory and enough data to take up in safety (perhaps) to Mars and beyond. But we knew that there should have been far more data, and that this data should have been collected by MR-1, the first of the circumlunar telemetering ships. This data we would have to get the hard way.

On the morning of the sixth day we went out to the field.

MR-1 was there. She was a big brute, as three stage rockets have to be. She made us feel very small. She made even the General look small. She was big enough looking at her from the outside, but our cabin would have been condemned by the A.S.P.C.A. had it been intended for the accommodation of two miniature poodles.

We were sealed in while the count down was under way. We sat there glumly. We should have been feeling elated, but we weren't. It was like sitting in an unusually cramped dentist's waiting room, waiting for the summons to the chair.

The count down finished. Hank shrugged his shoulders. He looked at me. I looked at him. I saw that his foot rested on the firing pedal. I saw the foot stamp down. Our chairs tipped backwards and held us. In spite of the soundproofing we were deafened by the roar of the rockets. In spite of our previous experience of acceleration we felt that our flattened guts would never again resume either their proper shapes or locations.

There was a brief respite when the first stage cut out—all this part of it, of course, was entirely automatic—and another when we dropped

the second stage. It was a great relief when the motors of the third stage ceased firing. Free fall is a pleasant sensation if you have the right psychological make-up. It's far pleasanter than 5G acceleration, no matter what psychological make-up you have.

We released ourselves from our chairs and took observations. Earth was below us, as we had seen her so often during our flights outside the atmosphere. The Moon was to one side of our course. I must confess that I had the panicky feeling that we were going to miss her and fall forever through empty Space. I knew that we were heading for where the Moon would be when we got there, but knowing a thing and feeling it aren't the same.

After the first wonderment had worn off we began to feel very blasé about the whole business. We just couldn't see why there should be all this fuss about a voyage to the Moon. It was no more than a straightforward problem in ballistics, and the target was so big that it was practically impossible to miss it. When we came to the turnover point the gyroscopes functioned perfectly. Deceleration was commenced on time, and the indications were that we should have ample propellant for all our requirements.

Below us the Moon swelled with every passing hour. At two hundred miles up it was still a sphere, but a huge one. At one hundred miles it was a vast plain with pronouncedly curved horizons. At fifty miles the red star over Copernicus was not so perfect as it appeared from Earth. The five arms of it were of unequal lengths, and ragged. But it was still impressive.

Then there wasn't much time for sightseeing. We were dropping slowly, I suppose, but it seemed far too fast. It seemed that the Moon was coming up to hit us—the pockmarked plain with that huge, gaudy, blotchy red star, the sheer cliffs and jagged mountains, the dark, dark shadows. Then the crater rim was above us, sharp against the black sky.

We touched.

It was not the hard shock that we were anticipating. It was like landing on a pile of feathers. Hank cursed and cut the drive. He cursed again as our descent continued. A grey tide, deepening to blackness, washed up over the control room viewpoints.

I said, "I'm only the navigator, but don't you think you should get us out of here?"

He replied, with elaborate courtesy, "There's nothing I'd like better, old man. But it should be obvious, even to the navigator, that every venturi will be well choked by now, and that firing the rockets will, at the very least, blow our stern off."

"Choked?" I asked stupidly. "What with?"

"Not orange blossoms," he told me. "Nor rose petals. Dust. Some kind of dust. Maybe powdered rock, maybe metal. Don't ask me how

it got there, but we must have landed right in the middle of a deep drift of the stuff."

"How do we get out?"

"That," he said, "is the sixty-four-thousand-dollar question."

We decided, then, to break out the bottle of brandy that we had brought along with us to toast our safe arrival on the Moon. We each had a stiff slug. We each had a second one. Reluctantly we put the bottle away.

We climbed into our spacesuits—and that part of it is easier in the writing than it was in the doing. As I've said already, our cabin was compact. It would have been hard enough for one man to struggle into a raincoat. The way we finally worked it, I had to curl up on the deck while Hank dressed, and he did the same while I got suited up.

Hank went into the airlock. I heard the pump start, saw the needle of the pressure gauge dropping. I saw the *Open* sign flash on the outer door indicator. I heard his voice, weak and distorted from my helmet phone.

"Like I said, it's dust. Luckily it's very light and fluffy. I've managed to get a space cleared round the door. Shut it again, and then come into the airlock yourself."

I did as he said, I waited until the pressure inside the airlock had built up, then clambered into it. I started the evacuation pump again. I opened the outer door.

Hank was outside, lying supine, arms and legs spread wide, in what looked like a small cave. I thought at first that something had happened to him. I was about to rush outside to his assistance when he stopped me.

"Don't make any fast moves!" he snapped, "or you'll bring the whole damned issue down on top of me!"

"Are you hurt?" I asked.

"No. But if I weren't lying like this I'd be neck deep in the infernal stuff by now. Stay where you are—we can talk just as well without your coming right outside.

"Now, Bill, this is the way that I've doped it out. We'll have to strip the ship of every non-essential piece of shielding or fairing. We shall want it all to line the sides of the shaft we're going to sink down to the stern and under the stern. We shall have to clear the jets, and make sure that there's a sufficiently large pit under them to take care of the back blast—"

"I didn't come all this way to be a miner," I said.

"Nor did I. But if we don't turn miners this will rank as one of the major disasters in American rocketry."

There was no arguing with that, so I went back inside the ship. After a short while he followed me.

We were amazed how much sheathing we were able to do without. It is quite remarkable how even when the saving of weight is the prime consideration the urge to make things look pretty—or neat—still persists. Safety comes into it too, of course. There is a lot to be said in favor of protective covering over wiring and plumbing.

What followed was hard work, and far from pleasant. Working by the light of our helmet lamps we sank the shaft along the ship's side, down to the stern. We dug a large pit under the exhausts, packing the fine, fluffy dust at its sides. Working in spells, and still far from happy about the prospects of radiation poisoning, we cleared the jets. It was after we were finished that we realized that we were standing on solid rock. This rather surprised us—we were beginning to think that the Moon was no more than a huge dust ball. We found, too, that the violently expanding vapors of the back blast would be diverted into a tunnel that run down from the solid surface at a slight angle.

At last, dog-tired and soaked in perspiration. We climbed back to the airlock. I let Hank go in first, but as I waited outside, my feet against the side of the ship and my back against the wall of the shaft, I felt that it was a great mistake that MR-1 hadn't been given an airlock capable of handling two people at once. There was so much dust outside, and a sharp movement on my part could so easily bring it all tumbling down to bury me.

The airlock door opened, and with great relief I tumbled into the tiny compartment. A few minutes later I was sitting with Hank in the control room.

We had some more brandy.

"The trouble," he said, "is that there's a certain amount of cohesion about the stuff. It may pack tight ahead of us as we try to blast out..."

"It behaves almost like wet sand," I said, "which it shouldn't."

"Of course," he pointed out, "we have to remember that the critical angle is different here from what it is on Earth."

"The critical angle?" I asked.

"Yes. Or the angle of repose, if you'd rather call it that. It's a result of two forces—friction and gravity. You make a pile of, say, sand—and it will always fall into a cone of the same shape. You make a pile of coal, or bulk grain, and the angle of repose will always be the same for those two."

"It must be different on the Moon," I said.

"Damn right it's different. . . ." He paused. "Talking about it won't get us anywhere."

"No. And we'd better show our noses—otherwise poor old Back Blast Bradley will be adding to his fine collection of ulcers."

"It'll be his own fault if he does," said Hank. "He should have given us radio. That's the worst of these rush jobs."

We finished the brandy, and gave it a try. We sat in our chairs,

praying hard, while the ship lurched and shuddered, straining every seam, It was impossible for us to tell whether or not we were making progress through the dust—our acceleration was too slight to register on the gauge.

Then, abruptly, we broke through, and the glaring sunlight streamed through the ports. We lifted faster and faster and we looked down on an astounding scene.

As far as we could see, ring walls and mountain ranges and hummocks and hills were crumbling and sliding and splashing and falling. The Russians' red star was already buried by sweeping tides of dust . . . the entire surface of the Moon was swirling, and flattening.

And that is why there is no Man in the Moon any more. That is why the Lunar Apennines and the Leibnitz Range are no more, and the Great Wall is gone. That is why the Moon is now an almost featureless ball, with all its old mystery and glamor a thing of the past.

Mountains of dust—that's what the mystery and glamor came from—that and the ring walled craters. Mountains of dust, rearing high with a spurious, flimsy majesty, with a steepness that would be impossible on Earth, maintaining a precarious balance.

Our exhaust, roaring through the tunnels honeycombing the solid core, set up tremors and destroyed that tenuous stability.

And that's way nobody loves us any more—neither the astronomers, not the public, nor the popular song writers.

Even so—I think that we should be entitled to a cut of the royalties from the latest effort. Have you heard it yet?

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Damon Knight . . .

Occasionally a story too, as MacLeish said of a poem, "should not mean, but be."

The Night of Lies

THE desert hills hung dark over the town. It was early evening, and the wind was blowing gently across the long spaces. A cricket struck up its song, out in the darkness somewhere; then another. Down the long twisting streets the purple lights began to glow, like soft witch-fires in the evening. They bathed the weathered false fronts with a magical radiance, filled the empty windows and the dusty silent rooms. A store-sign swayed back and forth, creaking cheerfully. A breath of music floated up the street. A man's laugh rocketed up, full-throated and joyous.

A woman stepped out onto the boardwalk with a swirl of spangled skirts. She was slender in cream-and-gold; her face was as pale and her hair as golden as her garments. "Ken!" she called. "Here!"

A man appeared under the distant arcade. He was lithe and slim, poised like a fighter. "Lorna! We're alive—and they're gone!"

Her laughter rippled down to him. "Of course! Isn't it wonderful?"

He came toward her with long strides. "Where's Murray? And Louise?"

"Here!"

"Here!"

A stocky man came out into view, red-cheeked and grinning; then a woman in a glimmering ice-blue gown. They came together in the middle of the long street, the men clasping hands and slapping shoulders, the women embracing.

"Alive—and the invaders gone!"

"Clean away—back to Arcturus!"

"Forgot us!"

"We're alive!"

In the violet glow their faces were exultant, eyes bright, teeth flashing. The woman called Louise swung her dark hair, and her feet began to

move to the music. "It's too wonderful—I can't stand still—I have to dance!"

She seized Murray's hands and drew him protesting into a breathless polka, around and around to the music, while the other two laughed until they cried. "Oh, Murray—if you could see yourself!"

"Never," panted the stocky man, mopping his face with a bandanna, "never in my life did I dance like that."

The others were silent a moment; the music had fallen into silence and the slow wind came lonely down the street. "But come on!" said Murray. "This is a night to celebrate—we've got places to go and things to do, my friends!"

Fire fountained from the church spire, red sparks floating on the wind. Every cornice was a worm of blue light. Roman candles soared with a whispering rush overhead. Rockets went up, to burst into silent stars dripping and fading down the sky. "To the watchtower!" cried Lorna.

"By the way of the wineshop!" shouted Murray. And their laughter echoed across the quiet town.

"I was the greatest scientist in the world," said Murray, looking out over the roofs.

"And I was the greatest singer," said Lorna.

"And I was the best boxer."

"And I was the most expensive whore."

"Now, we four . . ." said Murray, and a silence fell upon them. The desert was empty and dark, all around the town.

"To us!" cried Louise, raising her wineglass.

"To us!" and they drank, standing high above the rooftops, while the dark wind ruffled their hair.

"Why should it be we four?" whispered Lorna to Ken. "It seems so—"

"We're old friends," he said. "Who else would it be? Can you imagine the world without old Murray—or Lou?"

She touched his hair. "I always loved you—really."

"I know you did. I know that now, Lorna. And it's all right. I mean really all right, now, because we're alive, you hear? We're alive!"

The echoes fluttered away across the silent roofs and died at the edge of the desert.

"Four out of billions," said Murray, coming nearer, "because I know we are the last."

"It's better not to talk about it," said Louise, following him.

"But we all saw the invaders' ships floating across the sky, burning and burning . . . rank after rank of them, as if they had nothing to do but float there, and burn. There couldn't be anyone else alive."

"Well, then," said Louise with a bright glint of her eye, "four is enough, isn't it?"

"My dear—" said Murray, turning to her.

"Let's dance, then—let's sing!" cried Lorna. The music was skirling,

and the lights pulsed up over the tower like phantom combers breaking.

Loudly their laughter rang out across the wasteland, and untiring their bodies whirled about the floor. They drank the red wine in great draughts, and were not drunken; they sang, and never paused for breath. The night flowed away across the mountains; the first edge of dawn appeared in the east.

The music had stopped, and only the distant crickets were singing in the darkness. "I'm cold," said Lorna, "it's too cold here. Let's go down."

"Four out of billions," muttered Murray as they descended the tower. "How could they have come to miss us? I can't remember—why were we here, the four of us?"

"We drove," said Ken.

"Yes, at night," said Louise. "With the invaders up over the horizon—I remember. We came out across the desert, and then . . ." Her voice trailed away.

"I can't remember any more," said Lorna.

"No. Only a dream, a darkness, until we woke up."

"But we're alive—what does it matter? We're alive. . . ."

"Suppose they had all died," Murray muttered. "All, the whole planet recently dead."

"Don't talk about it."

"No, but think of the dead people lying in their thousands and millions, all night long—would they dream?"

"Don't talk about it."

"No, but would they dream? With no live people to interfere, to blot them out—such a refreshing thing, only the dead. Dreaming, in thousands, their one last night."

Lorna shuddered. "A nightmare."

"Yes." Murray nodded vehemently. "A terrible thing—it's good that we're not there, that the desert protects us. All those dead people, dreaming freely at last, but so many at once! One dream overlapping the next, fragments tearing fragments apart! A terrible last night, for the dead people in their billions."

They were silent, imagining the fretful voices, out beyond the mountains. *I was the greatest . . . I could have conquered the . . . men worshipped my beauty . . . I, I was the king of . . . no, listen to me, to me!*

They shuddered. Lorna said, "Why are we going this way?"

Ahead, in the town square, a car was overturned beside the old iron war monument. The hood was crumpled, the windshield smashed and scattered; there was a body lying, half in and half out.

"I saw it from the tower," Murray said dismally.

"Let's not go any nearer."

"But we have to, don't you understand? The night's almost over."

The purple witchfires were dying all down the street. The light in the east was rising.

"One of us?" whispered Ken.

They drew closer together, huddling in the cold dawn.

"But which one?"

They looked at each other. Lorna saw that Ken was turning misty, half transparent; a morning star burned through his breast. Seeing her stare, he crouched and said fiercely, "I'm real—me, I'm real!" And he struck his chest with his fist, but it made no sound.

"I'm dreaming you all," said Lorna disbelievingly. "I'm pretending. That must be me—my car, I was trying to get away, I crossed the desert and smashed up." But her voice was thin, and the morning light blazed through her as if she were made of paper.

"All dead? All dead?" said Murray's plaintive voice. He was gray as smoke, like all the rest. They drifted toward the monument.

They came together around the body that sprawled out of the wreck.

"I was the greatest scientist in the world," said Murray's voice, fading.

"I was the greatest boxer," echoed Ken's, and he was gone.

"I was the most expensive whore—" A faint voice, dying on the wind.

"I was the greatest singer—" A murmur, rustling away into unbroken silence.

The four were gone. Only the one sprawled figure remained—a slight young man, dead, with blood on his jacket, and his weak face twisted up at the stars. A last thought, fading: *And I—I was nothing at all.*

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whose stories at one time appeared in that late, lamented magazine UNKNOWN, offers this tale of four children from the future, a witch, a ghost, an unsettling sort of Moebius effect, and altogether a memorable experience . . .

THE WILLOW TREE

WHEN the four O ÷÷ children, Lucy, Robert, Charles, and May, were orphaned by a freak of circumstances, they were sent to live in the Past with two spinster relatives, ostensibly because of crowded conditions elsewhere. In reality, their archaic given names had suggested this quick solution to the overburdened Time & Welfare worker in charge of their case. True, the two elderly ladies were a bit, well, *unusual*—but they were kindly enough, and offered a pleasant home.

The children were quite young and therefore accepted the sudden death of both parents as a termination rather than a separation. They were told by their temporary foster, a well meaning ancient who remembered "Ohio," that their mother and father had "passed away." The children knew better. Their mother and father had died and had been numbered and encapsulated. "Away" was the Past, where they were going.

They missed their parents but they were really more accustomed to each other and, in childhood, it is impossible to dwell for long on absences, or grieve over them. Their sense of loss was further diminished

by the excitement of their own quick departure into the Past (a hand waved, the keep dollied slowly backwards, the stabilizer moved in, a roбивac began to count, the threads of goodbye were severed by a blue slice of brightening light), and their subsequent arrival at their destination which appeared to have been set down in the middle of nowhere.

"This," Charles observed, importantly taking in his surroundings, "is what was meant by 'country' when we were being synchronized at the Center."

"And 'isolation,'" Robert said. "We're 'isolated' in the 'country.'"

The children were charmed with the novel aspect of their environs and stared delightedly at their future home, a brooding old vine-shawled house which had mellowed into the untended landscape until it was scarcely visible from where they stood.

"Look," May exclaimed. "There's a truly pooskat!"

"Pussycat," Lucy corrected. "Use the proper obsoletes, May. Do you want the 'aunt' to think we're . . ." She paused, searching for the appropriate colloquialism.

"Lazyheads?" Charles conjectured.

"Headbones," Robert amended.

"Boneheads," Lucy sighed, full of her responsibilities as the eldest. "Pooskat, lazyheads, headbones. Mercy." She smoothed her "sash" and twitched May's "hair ribbon" straight. "Well, we can't stay stopspotted all day. Let's go. Okai?" She stepped forward, and the others followed.

Their Aunt Martha was a sweet, faded shell of a woman who reminded Lucy of the fragile, white, transparent, moonsnow carvings that had decorated the Lunar exhibit at the Solar Fair. Her welcome was warm and enveloping, even though it was somewhat lopsided due to her habit of holding her head askew as if she were listening, or had strained a ligament in her neck.

"Oh, you've come . . . you've come," she kept murmuring over and over, bending from one to the other and touching them as if they were surprising flowers. "You've come at last."

Ushering them in to meet their other aunt in the shattered library where she sat, slitting the pages of a book with an ivory cutter, their Aunt Martha's frail cadence was triumphant. "Harriet. The children are *here*."

"So I see, Sister," their Aunt Harriet said. "So I see." She nodded pleasantly at them across the clutter of volumes on the desk. "And I'll wager they're ready for tea. Eh?"

They chorused assent, and Lucy, remembering a lesson from *Mores Of The Past*, appended, "Thank you," and, reaching out, grasped her Aunt Harriet's hand and shook it. It felt like a withered bouquet of knuckles, and Lucy decided that after this she would confine herself to the Past-custom of "the excuse-me."

"The children are ready for tea, Sister," their Aunt Harriet said. "The speculation arises, is the tea ready for the children?"

When their Aunt Martha had departed, in a fluster, their Aunt Harriet leaned back in her chair and addressed the children in her paper-dry voice.

Her sister, she informed them, was not herself, upon occasion. She was prone to have . . . ah . . . notions. (She made a vapid three-fingered gesture to and fro in front of her forehead to indicate both the vaporous quality and the location of her sister's malaise.) Sister was easily upset by trifles, and, consequently, they were not to trouble her *on any account whatsoever*. Was this perfectly clear?

The children bobbed their heads. They had heard of the peculiar affliction (pronounced Kok'tals') which had plagued the Past-people.

They could have full freedom of the house and grounds, their aunt continued, with but a single exception.

She pushed herself to her feet and leveled a skinny forefinger at a pair of closed double doors under which seeped a saffron chink of late sunlight, as if she were indicating an object that lay somewhere beyond, outside in the waning afternoon.

"If you wish to remain here, in peace, you must not play under the willow tree," she said.

Since this regulation was not too different from somewhat similar bygone rules, such as their mother's habitual admonition to stay on their own side of the ramp, or the downtown signals intoning "Don't escalate," the children did not question it. In fact, they immediately felt more at home, and Robert, emboldened, pointed at a feather peeping from the volume whose pages she had been cutting.

"What kind of a feather is that?" he inquired.

For an instant, as his aunt's eyelids flickered, he had the queer impression that he ought not've asked. Maybe he ought've stuck on a "Yesm." Or not be pointing. Embarrassed, he ran the offending finger under an imaginary drip on the end of his nose.

However, extending her hand, his aunt extracted the feather and stroked it, half-smiling, as if recalling an amusing long-ago incident.

"A peacock's feather," she answered in a recollective tone. "I put it there as a bookmark, once upon a time."

"Do you have peacocks?" May wanted to know.

"Peacocks are extinct," Charles told her.

"Poo—pussycats are extinct, too," May said, "but we saw one, didn't we? A black one."

"At present, we have no peacocks," their aunt said, "Unlike willows, they are difficult to . . . raise."

"See?" Charles said to May, "I told you."

Their aunt held the feather out to Robert. "Would you like to have it?"

"Yesm," Robert said, taking the proffered gift. It felt dusty and stiff and, never having owned a peacock's feather before, he grew warm and shy, and boylike, slipped it inside his "shirt."

"Do peacocks be extinct, Aunt?" May pressed, reluctant to concede.

"Nothing is quite ever what it seems to be," her aunt replied.

"See?" May said to Charles.

During their "tea," with "Sister," in the funny old "kitchen," Robert removed the feather for a closer inspection. Had the children not been forewarned, Sister's reaction to this "trifle" would have dried the food in their mouths.

"Where did you get that?" she whispered, showing her teeth, her head cocked at an alarming angle. "The peacocks were destroyed. Destroyed! I thought if I destroyed the peacocks—" She broke off, and snatched the feather from him, repeating, "Where did you get this? Tell me!"

But, even while he was explaining, she removed a stove lid from the range and thrust the feather into the glowing coals, holding it down with a long handled fork until it was consumed. When she returned to the table she was obviously shaken.

"Children," she breathed, her hands pressed against her throat, "listen to me. *You must never play under the willow tree.*"

"Yes, we know," Lucy said, in the soothing inflection their mother had used when one of the children had needed comforting.

Any lingering doubts they may have entertained concerning the nature of Sister's "notions" were quelled by her fits and starts of odd behavior within the first few weeks. There was the morning when she had come upon May's doll which May, playing "sewing machine," had used for a pin-cushion. There was the day she had found Charles's list of Past-curiosities that weren't extinct (toads 12, snakes 5, bats 6 pr., newts 9, owls 2, pussycats 1, lizards 23, spiders, flies, etc.) and had thought he was going to cook these things in a "recipe." And the day she had yanked a galloping Lucy off a frazzled broom she'd discovered and was using for a "cowboy." And the day she'd nearly had a faint when May, puzzling over an old tome she'd dredged up from the bottom of a bin in the storeroom, had asked her the meaning of a word. "What are you doing with a spelling book?" she had cried. "Where did you get it? Give it to me. Give it to me this minute!"

Once, through the bannisters, they had watched her listening to the grandfather's clock on the stair landing, her ear pressed flat against the empty and tickless case. Another day, when Charles had made a silly noise, she had come rushing, muzzy from her nap, believing she had heard a peacock's cry. Lucy had led her back to her bedroom, as if

she, Lucy, were Sister, and Sister a child. "The peacocks are gone. All gone," Lucy had reassured her patiently. "The peacocks aren't here anymore."

Aunt Martha—Sister—was constantly touching them, as if to convince herself that they were real children and not figments of a warped imagination. Sometimes she disappeared and was gone for hours, and sometimes she called to them frequently, apparently thinking they might have left, or hadn't come yet, or had gotten lost around a crook in Time, which she seemed to visualize as a sort of circle with a half-twist to it . . . like the Moebius Ride at the Solar Fair, Lucy thought. *Exactly* like the Moebius Ride, on which everything had been straight and turny, simultaneously, and where in spite of the fact that there was only one riding surface the rider had whizzed roundabout on two sides of it and yet nobody had been upside down. And May had gotten stomachy and their father had bought them each a stick of oxygen candy. Later, he had showed them the way the ride worked. He had given a narrow strip of paper a half twist and adhered the ends. Then, with a penl he had drawn a continuous line down the middle of the looping strip to demonstrate how, without ever lifting the penl from the paper, the line could be made to somehow go over and under without ever going over and under at all. Except that it did! Charles had made a sing of it that went:

The Moebius ride goes
roundabout
and over and under and
inside out
But strange to say, there's
just one side
To the loopy loopy
Moebius ride!

Funny, how dim the previous had become. Almost like a Sister-dream. Poor fuddled Sister.

They were fond of her, but gradually they drifted into the practice of avoiding her as much as they were able, and the trackless days flowed one into the other. By then, without having to be told, they had also learned not to bother their Aunt Harriet. Besides, she had a way of turning the points of words so that they sounded like riddles, which made what she said *hear* like it wasn't what she meant. "Today was tomorrow yesterday." What kind of an answer was that to the query, what day is today? "If wherever you are is here, is there here when you are there?" What could you make of a question like that? And

she had two stock rejoinders for bulwarks. "Nothing is ever quite what it seems," and "Run along, now."

They had no intention of playing under the willow tree. There was such a plentitude of permissible territory to explore. The wild overgrown garden was a fascinating pathless wonderland with a snake hole by the toppled and moldering "sundial." There was the tumbled stone fence for a "fort," a shallow "pond" where they could "fish" and skip flat rocks and do wading. There were clover crowns and daisy chains to fashion, real clouds to watch, little sunning lizards to tickle with a grassblade, an "attic" for rainy days, trunks and drawers filled with musty treasures. . . .

Yet, as the summer lengthened, the *idea* of the willow tree began to weigh on them. Somehow, the willow tree was always there.

They would be fishing contentedly in the pond and a yellow-green willow leaf, borne by a vagrant breeze, would drop on the still surface to float among the cloud reflections and the skimming dragonflies—a tiny t-tinsie reminder that they mustn't play under the willow tree. Or, trying to settle on where to have a "picnic," they would fall quiet thinking . . . anywhere, except under the willow tree. And, tiring of a game or a sham-battle or a chase and flopping down to consider what-to-do next they would think, *we must not go under the willow tree*.

Once, caught in an unexpected downpour and racing up to the house through the hard pelting rain the thought had struck them, like a four-pronged forked of lightning, *we could take shelter under the willow tree*—but Sister had come out on the back porch and had mentioned to them to hurryhurryhurry and they had run on. Again, one breathlessly hot interminable day when the heat rose in shimmers everywhere, May had put their ruminations into words.

"I'll bet it's cool under the willow tree," she said, wiping her sweaty little face on her sleeve. "I'll bet it's *damned* cool."

"Let's—" Charles began.

"No," Lucy said, reeling in the beetle she had been flying at the end of a string. "You know it's a rule not to. And quit making up words, May. Use the ones we've got."

"I didn't make it up," May said. "It was in that old speller book Sister took away from me."

"What's it mean, then?"

"It means you get your mouth washed out with soap and water," May said.

"That doesn't seem very reasonable," Lucy said, not caring. It was too hot to care. She plopped her listless beetle in the shade of a toadstool and fanned him with a wilted dandelion.

"That's not the only thing around here that isn't very reasonable," Robert said, rolling over on his elbows to peer in the direction of the

forbidden challenge, like a green spilling fountain, trailing its leafy curtain of stirring tendrils invitingly on the parched grass.

"I don't know what you three are going to do," Charles announced, "but I know what *I'm* going to do. Right this second."

They gazed at him, unbelieving. He *wouldn't* . . . no matter how cool it might be under the willow tree, he wouldn't dare. . . .

"I'm going to go—" he grinned mischievously at them—"bellywhop in the pond," he finished. He sprinted off, shouting over his shoulder, "Last one in is a scarepoos!"

Thus, finally, like a fly in amber, the ? of the willow was imbedded in their minds. Always *there* . . . A dark fleck in the middle. The core. The one central spot. The focal point. The place. Until, one afternoon, engaged in a wild spontaneous game of Follow-the-Leader that had started in the ruined garden, they went steeling up the lane and over the fence and back again and around the arbor and into the barn and climb the ladder and jump from the loft and circle the pond and splash across and tag the well and duck under the sweep and leap the stump and whirl about to veer away down the slope and under the willow tree . . . almost without thinking, as if they had thought about it for so long that it had become the most familiar place of all.

When they emerged their faces were pale and sick. Lucy's hair lay plastered in damp rings against her brow and she was shivering. A trickle of blood oozed from Roberts' lower lip where he had bitten it. May began to cry and Charles, burnt-eyed and white toothed, lifted a leaden arm and pointed at the house, where, from a downstairs window, their Aunt Harriet beckoned to them.

The children, having assembled in a line before their aunt in the library, waited like stones for her to speak. But she only sat, savoring their expressions, while the silence stretched longer and thinner and tauter to be broken at last by May who buried her tear-stained cheeks in Lucy's skirt and sobbed, "I want to go home . . . I want to go home . . ."

Their aunt smiled as if at a witty joke. "Kindly control yourself, May, lest you disturb Sister, who does not like to remember that, by destroying the peacocks out of their Time, she inadvertently destroyed a rather large segment of continuity and warped the joining. Did you hear me, May? I said to control yourself, lest you disturb Sister. Sister—"

"*. . . is hanging under the willow tree!*" May screamed.

"—especially does not like to be reminded that she is a ghost," their aunt said, equably.

"And you, you are an old w . . . *witch*," Charles said in horror.

The truth having been concretized by words, the children backed away, backed, backed slowly away, and suddenly turned and fled. Looking like blurred photographs of themselves in the tarnished mirror in

the hall, they ran past the curving staircase and the age-dimmed old portraits and out the door that stood open to the fragrant late summer air. Across the splintery veranda and down the sagging steps they went, past the library where their Aunt Harriet, book in hand, watched them from the threshold of the great double door flung wide like shadowing wings behind her.

Past the garden they streaked, eyed by the cat, and down the slope, and, when Lucy began to untie her sash, May started to weep disconsolately, and Robert, hitching up his "belt," stopped and lifted her and carried her in his arms. Without a single backward glance they hastened on, and, simply because they could not stay and did not know what else to do, they all went under the willow tree.

"Where are the children?" Sister wanted to know from the threshold of the double doors where she stood tying on a fresh apron, her countenance still vague with sleep. "I can't find them anywhere. I've called and called. Have you seen them, Harriet?"

Harriet, seated on the garden bench, glanced up from the book she was reading. "Yes. And . . . no," she said.

"You either have or you haven't, Harriet. Why must you always be so, oh, round-about. Do you know where they are?"

"Are? No. They . . . were . . . swinging under the willow tree."

"The willow tree," Sister said in a hushed, frightened tone that died on a caught breath, and was superseded by a perplexed expression. "Willow tree? What willow tree, Harriet? We have no willow tree." She rubbed her hand across her puckered brow as if to knead out a kink in her train of thought. "The children—" she began on a bewildered note and stopped, her puzzled eyes fixed on the mincing peacock whose furled plumes tiptailed the gravel garden path. Her gaze grew hazy and questioning, then blank.

She gave her head a slight shake as though to clear it.

"We have no willow tree," she reiterated stubbornly.

Harriet inserted a slim forefinger between the pages of her book. "Then I must raise one, presently, to have it ready for them when they come."

"When who comes, dear?"

"The children, Sister."

"Oh. Oh, yes. Of course. It all seems . . ." she frowned, hunting for the correct word.

"Roundabout," said Harriet.

"Thank you," her sister said.

"Thank you," Harriet replied. She arose and strolled to the marble sundial where she consulted the slanting shadow of Time. The peacock, strutting ahead of her, quickened its promenade.

Stooping, Harriet retrieved a bright fallen feather and put it in her book to mark the place.

A first story from the pen of—

Leslie Jones

THE DEVIL & MRS. ACKENBAUGH

MRS. ACKENBAUGH and Mr. Crumb were good friends for a long time. They talked about many things and each felt that he had never had such an understanding friend. Eventually they introduced their marriage partners to each other and then the four of them were family friends. Mr. Crumb would drive Mrs. Ackenbaugh home from the office where they both worked and the two couples would have dinner together and play records and talk and talk and talk.

One day, on the way home, Mr. Crumb turned to Mrs. Ackenbaugh and said, "You know, you have the most beautiful hair I've ever seen." After that, Mrs. Ackenbaugh was in love with Mr. Crumb because when she was with him she felt as if she were beautiful, but when she was with Mr. Ackenbaugh she felt a little plain. But of course, she said nothing to Mr. Crumb about her love. She merely wrapped it up in a neat little ribbon so that she could take it out and enjoy it when she was alone.

She had worked ever since she married because Mr. Ackenbaugh was taking his post-graduate work at the university and they needed her salary to make ends meet. But, a few weeks after she fell in love with Mr. Crumb, her husband won his degree and took a position in a small college in a small resort town by a lake.

It was a pleasant town and Yvette Ackenbaugh gave herself up delightfully to the responsibilities of complete leisure. She lay for hours in the sun and learned to swim and lost a bulge or two which had annoyed her and became refreshed and rested and altogether an improvement over her former self. The sun was strong and it changed her pale white skin to gold and put streaks of pure bronze in her hair. Sometimes, as she lay in the sun, she thought without regret of Mr. Crumb. All in all, it was a dream-like year and she eventually stopped thinking at all and drifted through each day as it came.

And then Mr. Clarence Crumb drove down to see them. His doctor had decided he should take a little rest before his blood pressure went any higher and Mr. Crumb had decided to see his old friends again. His wife sent along a little note saying she would liked to have come but she felt that she and her husband deserved a vacation from each other.

When Yvette saw Mr. Crumb she felt all her love return stronger than ever . . . for she felt younger and healthier and more capable of having a strong emotion now. She introduced him to her routine of lying in the sun by the lake and the two of them began a pleasant interval of lazy days filled with desultory talk and a little swimming. Their talk more and more concerned just the two of them, and when Mr. Ackenbaugh returned home from his classes in the afternoons, they had to stop a minute and re-orient themselves to his existence. One day Mr. Crumb said, "You look all golden lying there in the sun." He also said a number of other things but he and Yvette both knew that he had really said he loved her. After that, they were in each others' arms a great deal and they whispered senselessly, "Yvette, Yvette," and "Clarence, Clarence."

But the day came when he had to return home. His leave of absence was up, his blood pressure was down, and his wife had started calling daily to inquire tenderly about his health. They parted with a feeling of sadness because they did not know each other well enough to know whether this was the end or the beginning for them.

When Mrs. Ackenbaugh fell in love with Mr. Crumb, she had felt practically the same as ever except for having something nice to think about. But when Mr. Crumb fell in love with *her* she had a strange reaction. She felt not only enchanted but enchanting, not only bewitched but bewitching—bewitched, bewitching, and beautiful.

She looked with wonder in the mirror, and hugged herself, and said ecstatically, "Clarence loves me." She saw herself through the eyes of her lover and was enchanted with what she saw. Mr. Ackenbaugh seemed to notice a change in her too. For he became more affectionate in his fumbling way and Mrs. Ackenbaugh found herself torn between annoyance and compassion for him.

She did not know what to do. Sometimes she felt an almost overpowering urge to call Mr. Crumb in the city and say "I can't stand it. Come take me away where we can be together!" But the sight of her husband sitting and correcting his students' papers and looking up at her with fond satisfaction was enough to stop her. And there was the memory of the talk she and Mr. Crumb had had before he left. They had agreed that they were too intelligent and sensible to break up two marriages. She couldn't violate that agreement now and show him that she was weak and selfish. And there was that horrible thought lurking somewhere back of her consciousness that if Mr. Crumb had to make a choice he might not choose her. . . .

The outward result of her inner guilt was that she became kinder and

kinder to her husband. She found herself insisting on helping him with the dull business of grading papers. So they sat side by side during the lengthening evenings while she read the themes of the students and even read a few books.

She found herself becoming interested in one of his courses, almost against her will. It was a history course and dealt with superstition and witchcraft in the Middle Ages and Mrs. Ackenbaugh found herself strangely fascinated by some of the morbid and weird rituals. She had always considered herself too sophisticated to put stock in superstitions but now, caught in the spell of some of the old books, it came to her that the world must have been an exciting place when you could have a ring to twist on your finger and make a wish, or when you could draw a six-pointed star within a circle and summon a malignant spirit.

She made little jokes to Mr. Ackenbaugh about her decision to become a witch but somehow she knew that she was trying to cover up a growing conviction that her future held something highly unusual. A strange restlessness began to grow inside her. It was very much as if she were waiting for something, but for what?

Her walks about the countryside grew longer and sometimes she even found herself slipping out after dinner to see the moonlight slide over the dry grass. She felt an expectancy, an urgency, that was almost unbearable.

And then, after one particularly quiet and ordinary Friday evening meal with Mr. Ackenbaugh, she knew that the waiting was over. Her pulses throbbed "*Tonight*" as she slipped on a sweater and walked out through brittle oak branches to a moon-washed clearing. She sat solemnly down on a mound of dry grass and then she saw him in the pale light at the edge of the clearing.

He had combed his hair so the horns scarcely showed and as he glided toward her soundlessly Mrs. Ackenbaugh was hardly nervous at all. And then she was aware of nothing but his eyes. They were enormous compelling eyes which were either green or gray or blue and there were flecks like the seafoam swirling in their depths. Somehow, it seemed as though the secrets of the whole world were in those eyes if she could only look into them long enough.

Then he closed his eyes for a full minute and she was able to pull herself back to the present. "D-did you come to bargain for my soul?"

He looked a little amused and a little bored. "Good Heavens, no. That sort of thing is dreadfully archaic."

"But . . . you did come looking for me."

"On the contrary, it is you who came looking for me." He looked at her kindly. "Did you think I would have come at all if you hadn't been one of us?"

Mrs. Ackenbaugh felt somewhat chilled all of a sudden but did

manage to remember the business at hand. "Well, will you help me then?"

The Devil stroked his chin with a horny-looking hand. "First, let me ask why don't you and Mr. Crumb simply get divorces and marry each other? This is done by hundreds of people every day and nobody cares much, one way or the other."

Mrs. Ackenbaugh said, "Well, we promised each other, I mean, neither of us wants to cause any sorrow. I mean, my husband needs me and his wife is older than I and not as pretty and it would just be cruel."

He waved his arm disgustedly. "So, you really want to enjoy all the pleasures of forbidden fruit but you want to do it while thinking of yourself as noble." His lip curled slightly.

Mrs. Ackenbaugh was stung by this unglamorized view of herself. "I should think you'd be the last person to criticize anyone. But can you manage for Clarence and me to be together without hurting anyone?"

"You'd be surprised at the things I can manage," he said. "You could have Mr. Crumb without any change in your domestic arrangements, but I warn you, the price is high for those who want to eat their cake and have it too. This goes for Crumbs too," and he cackled in a high-pitched cracked voice.

Mrs. Ackenbaugh winced at the atrocious pun, for she was a woman of some taste and discrimination, but nevertheless she hastened to say, "Oh, I'd pay anything if I could have Clarence the rest of my life without hurting George and Ruth!"

The Devil suddenly waved his leathery arm, grew several inches and became imperious in manner. "Hear then," he intoned; "the Devil's gifts have three prices and you must agree in advance to accept them all and pay them without complaint. Do you agree?"

Mrs. Ackenbaugh looked into his eyes, which now seemed to be more smoke than seawater, and said, "Agreed," before she could change her mind.

"Then hear the agreement," he said solemnly. "You are to have Mr. Crumb and there shall be no change in either his or your domestic arrangements. And the first of your three prices is that the bargain is irrevocable; you can never turn back."

"As if I would ever want to," said Mrs. Ackenbaugh.

"And," he said, "the second of your prices is that there is a third price and you will not know what that is until it is too late." Suddenly his laugh was very unpleasant.

Mrs. Ackenbaugh shivered involuntarily. "Well, that sounds sort of sinister, not to mention silly . . . but I'm agreed." She leaned forward. "Now tell me, how is this going to happen?"

He chuckled. "That you will know soon enough, too soon perhaps. You will wake up late tomorrow morning and you will be amazed at

(continued on page 112)



Poul Anderson's

THE GAME OF GLORY

Captain Flandry came to the dying marine under a red dwarf sun, with snowflakes falling like blood-drops out of great, clotted clouds. "... don't lap my blood so fast!" the warning boy screamed. And he gasped enough gore before he died to send Flandry on a long and deadly hunt to a watery world where a monstrous enemy waited for any man who believed in freedom—and in life. . . .

A MURDERED man on a winter planet gave Flandry his first clue. Until then, he had only known that a monster fled Conjumar in a poisoned wreck of a spaceship, which might have gone twenty light-years before killing its pilot but could surely never have crossed the Spican marshes to refuge.

And the trouble was—even for the Terran Empire, which contained an estimated four million stars—a sphere twenty lightyears across held a devil's number of suns.

Flandry went through motions. He sent such few agents as could be spared from other jobs, for they were desperately undermanned in the frontier provinces, to make inquiries on the more likely planets within that range. Of course they drew blanks. Probably was stacked against them. Even if they actually visited whatever world the fugitive had landed on, he would be lying low for a while.

Flandry swore, recalled his men to more urgent tasks, and put the monster under filed-but-not-forgotten. Two years went by. He was sent to Betelgeuse and discovered how to lie to a telepath. He slipped into the Merseian Empire itself, wormed and blackmailed until he found a suitable planet (uninhabited, terrestroid, set aside as a hunting preserve of aristocrats) and got home again: whereafter the Terran Navy quietly built an advanced base there and Flandry wondered if the same thing had happened on his side of the fence. He went to Terra on leave, was invited to the perpetual banquet of the Lyonid family, spent three epochal months, and was never quite sure whether he seduced the wrong man's wife or she him. At any rate, he fought a reluctant duel, gave up hope of early promotion to rear admiral, and accepted re-assignment to the Spican province.

Thus it was he found himself on Brae.

This world had been more or less independent until a few months ago. Then military considerations forced the establishment of a new base in the region. It did not have to be Brae, but Brae was asked, by a provincial governor who thought its people would be delighted at the extra trade and protection. The Braean High Temple, which had long watched its old culture and religion sapped by Terran influence, declined. One does not decline an Imperial invitation. It was repeated. This time it was refused. The provincial governor insisted. Brae said it would go over his head and appeal to the Emperor himself. The governor, who did not want attention drawn to his precise mode of government, called for local Navy help.

Wherefore Flandry walked through smashed ruins under a red dwarf sun, with a few snowflakes falling like blood drops out of great clotted clouds. He was directing the usual project in cases like this—search, inquiry, more search, more interrogation, until the irreconcilables had been found and exiled, the safely collaboration-minded plugged into a governmental framework. But when the blaster crashed, he whirled and ran toward the noise as if to some obscure salvation.

"Sir!" cried the sergeant of his escort. "Sir, not there—snipers, terrorists—wait!"

Flandry leaped the stump of a wall, zigzagged across a slushy street, and crouched behind a wrecked flyer. His own handgun was out, weaving around; his eyes flickered in habitual caution. On a small plaza ahead of him stood a squad of Imperial marines. They must have been on routine patrol when someone had fired at them from one of the

surrounding houses. They responded with tiger precision. A tracer dart, flipped from a belt almost the moment the shot came, followed the trail of ions to a certain facade. A rover bomb leaped from its shoulder-borne rack, and the entire front wall of the house went up in shards. Before the explosion ended, the squad attacked. Some of the debris struck their helmets as they charged.

Flandry drifted to the plaza. He saw now why the men's reaction was to obliterate: it was an invariable rule when a marine was bushwhacked dead.

He stooped over the victim. This was a young fellow, African-descended, with husky shoulders; but his skin had gone gray. He gripped his magnetic rifle in drilled reflex (or was it only a convulsive clutching at his mother's breast, as a dying man's mouth will try to suck again?) and stared through frog-like goggles on a turtle-like helmet. He was not, after all, dead yet. His blood bubbled from a stomach ripped open, losing itself in muddy snow. Under that dim sun, it looked black.

Flandry glanced up. His escort had surrounded him, though their faces turned wistfully toward the *crump-crump* of blasters and bomb guns. They were marines too.

"Get him to a hospital," said Flandry.

"No use, sir," answered the sergeant. "He'd be dead before we arrived. We've no revival equipment here yet, either, or stuff to keep him functional till they can grow another belly on him."

Flandry nodded and hunkered down by the boy. "Can I help you son?" he asked, as gently as might be.

The wide lips shinned back from shining teeth. "Ah, ah, ah," it gasped. "It's him in Uhunhu that knows." The eyes wallowed in their sockets. "Ai! 'List nay, they said. Nay let recruiters 'list you . . . damned Empire . . . even to gain war-skill, don't 'list . . . shall freedom come from slave-masters, asked he in Uhunhu. He and his 'ull teach what we must know, see you?" The boy's free hand closed wildly on Flandry's. "D'you understand?"

"Yes," said Flandry. "It's all right. Go to sleep."

"Ai, ai, look at her up there, grinning—" Despite himself, Flandry stared skyward. He was crouched by a fountain, which now held merely icicles. A slender column rose from the centre, and on top of it the nude statue of a girl. She was not really human, she had legs too long, and a tail and pouch and sleek fur, but Flandry had not often seen such dancing loveliness trapped in metal; she was springtime and a first trembling kiss under windy poplars. The waning marine screamed.

"Leave me 'lone, leave me 'lone, you up there, leave me 'lone! Stop grinning! I 'listed for to learn how to make Nyanza free, you hear up there, don't lap my blood so fast. It's nay my fault I made more slaves. I wanted to be free too! Get your teeth out of me, girl . . . mother, mother, don't eat me, mother—" Presently the boy died.

Captain Sir Dominic Flandry, Intelligence Corps, Imperial Terrestrial Navy, squatted beside him, under the fountain, while the marines blew down another house or two for good measure. A squadron of full-armoured infantry did a belt-flit overhead, like jointed faceless dolls. A stringed instrument keened from a window across the square: Flandry did not know the Braean scale, the music might be dirge or defiance or ballad or coded signal.

He asked finally: "Anyone know where this chap was from?"

His escort looked blank. "A colonial, sir, judging from the accent," ventured one of the privates. "We sign on a lot, you know."

"Tell me more," snapped Flandry. He brooded a while longer. "There'll be records, of course."

His task had suddenly shifted. He would have to leave another man in charge here and check the dead boy's home himself, so great was the personnel shortage. Those delirious babblings could mean much or nothing, but civilization was spread hideously thin out here, where the stars faded toward barbarism, and the Empire of Merseia beyond, and the great unmapped Galactic night beyond that.

As yet he did not think of the monster, only that he was lonesome among his fellow conquerors and would be glad to get off on a one-man mission. At least a world bearing some Africans might be decently warm.

He shivered and got up and left the square. His escort trudged around him, their slung rifles pointed at a thin blue sky. Behind them the girl on the fountain smiled.

II

The planet was five parsecs from Brae. It was the third of an otherwise uninteresting F5 dwarf, its official name was Nyanza, it had been colonized some 500 years back during the breakup of the Commonwealth. It had been made an Imperial client about a century ago, a few abortive revolts were crushed, now there was only a resident—which meant a trouble-free but unimportant and little visited world. The population was estimated at 10^7 . That was all the microfiles had to say about Nyanza.

Flandry had checked them after identifying the murdered man, who turned out to be Thomas Umbolu, 19, free-born commoner of Jainno-vaunt on Nyanza, no dependents, no personal oaths or obligations of fealty, religion "Christian variant," height 1.82 meter, weight 84 kilos, blood type O plus. . . . His service record was clean, though only one year old. A routine pre-induction hypno had shown no serious disaffection; but of course that hadn't meant a damn thing since the techniques of deep conditioning became general knowledge; it was just another bureaucratic ritual.

Flandry took a high-speed flitter and ran from Brae. Even so, the enforced idleness of the trip was long enough to remind him acutely that he had been celibate for weeks. He spent a good deal of the time in calisthenics. It bored him rigid, but a trim body had saved his life more than once and made it easy to get bed partners on softened worlds like Terra.

When the robopilot said they were going into approach, he spent some while dressing himself. An Intelligence officer had wide latitude as regards uniforms, and Flandry took more advantage of it than most. After due consideration, he clad his tall form in peacock-blue tunic, with white crossbelts and as much gold braid as regulations would stand; red sash and matched guns, needler and blaster; iridescent white trousers; soft black boots of authentic Terran beefleather. He hung a scarlet cloak from his shoulders and cocked a winged naval cap on his long sleek head. Surveying himself in the mirror, he saw a lean sunlamp-browned face, grey eyes, seal-brown hair and moustache, straight nose, high cheekbones: yes, he knew his last plasmecosmetic job had made his face too handsome, but somehow never got around to changing it again. He put a cigaret between his lips, adjusted its jaunty angle with care, inhaled it to light, and went to his pilot's seat. Not that he had anything to do with the actual piloting.

Nyanza shone before him, the clearest and most beautiful blue of his life, streaked with white cloudbelts and shuddering with great auroral streamers. He spotted two moons, a smallish one close in and a large one further out. He scowled. Where were the land masses? His robot made radio contact and the screen offered him a caucasoid face above a short-sleeved shirt.

"Captain Sir Dominic Flandry, Imperial Navy Intelligence, requesting permission to land." Sometimes he wondered what he would do if his polite formula ever met a rude no.

The visage gaped. "Oh . . . oh . . . already?"

"Hm?" said Flandry. He caught himself. "Ah, yes," he said wisely.

"But only today, sir!" babbled the face. "Why, we haven't even thought about sending a courier out yet—it's been such a nightmare—oh, thank God you're here, sir! You'll see for yourself, at once, there isn't a Technician in the City—on Altla—on all Nyanza, who doesn't set loyalty to his Majesty above life itself!"

"I'm sure his Majesty will be very much relieved," said Flandry. "Now, if you please, how about a landing beam?" After a pause, a few clicks, and the beginning downward rush of his ship: "Oh, by the way, Bubbles. Where did you put your continents today?"

"Continents, sir?"

"You know. Large dirty places to stand on."

"Of course I know, sir!" The control man drew himself up. "We're no parochials in the City. I've been to Spica myself."

"Would it be despicable if you had not?" mused Flandry. Most of him was listening to the fellow's accent. The inexhaustible variations on Anglic were a hobby of his.

"But as for the continents, sir, why, I thought you would know. Nyanza has none. Altla is just a medium-sized island. Otherwise there are only rocks and reefs, submerged at double high tide, or even at Loa high."

"Oh, I knew," said Flandry reassuringly. "I just wanted to be sure you knew." He turned off the receiver and sat thinking. Damn those skimpy pilot's manuals! He'd have had to go to Spica for detailed information. If only there was a faster-than-light equivalent of radio. Instant communications unified planets; but the days and weeks and months between stars let their systems drift culturally apart—let hell brew for years, unnoticed till it boiled over—made a slow growth of feudalism, within the Imperial structure itself, inevitable. Of course, that would give civilization something to fall back on when the Long Night finally came.

The spaceport was like ten thousand minor harbors: little more than a grav-grid, a field, and some ancillary buildings, well out of town. Beyond the hangars, to west and south, Flandry saw a greenness of carefully tended forest. Eastward rose the spires of a small ancient city. Northward the ground sloped down in harsh grass and boulders until it met a smothering white surf and an impossibly blue ocean. The sky above was a little darker than Terra's—less dust to scatter light—and cloudless; the sun was blindingly fierce, bluish tinged. It was local summer: Altla lay at 35° N. latitude on a Terra-sized planet with a 21° axial tilt. The air held an illusion of being cooler than it was, for it blew briskly and smelled of salt and the ultra-violet-rich sun gave it a thunderous tinge of ozone.

Still, Flandry wished he had not been quite such a dude. The portmaster, another blond caucasoid, looked abominably comfortable in shorts, blouse, and kepi. Flandry took a morose satisfaction in noting that the comfort was merely physical.

"Portmaster Heinz von Sonderburg, sir, at your service. Naturally, we waive quarantine on your behalf; no Imperial knight would—Ah. Your luggage will be seen to, Captain . . . Flandry? Of course. Most honored. I have communicated with her Excellency and am happy to report she can offer you the usual official hospitality. Otherwise we would have had to do our poor best for you in the City—"

"Her Excellency?" asked Flandry when they were airborne.

"Is that not the proper usage?" Von Sonderburg made washing motions with his hands. "Oh, dear, I am so sorry. This is such an isolated planet—the occasion so seldom arises—Believe me, sir, we are uncouth only in manner. The City, at least, has an enlightened forward-looking spirit of absolute loyalty to the Imperium which—"

"It's just that I thought, in a case like this, where the only Terrans on the planet are the resident and family, they'd have appointed a man." Flandry looked down toward the city. It was old, haphazardly raised out of native stone, with steep narrow streets, teeming pedestrians, very few cars or flyers.

But the docks were big, sleekly modern, and aswarm with ships. He made out everything from plastic pirogues to giant submarines. There was a majority of sailing craft, which implied an unhurried esthetic-minded culture; but they were built along radical hydrodynamic lines, which meant that the culture also appreciated efficiency. A powered tug was leaving the bay with a long tail of loaded barges, and air transport was extensively in use.

Elsewhere Flandry recognized a set of large sea-water processing units and their attached factories, where a thousand dissolved substances were shaped into usefulness. A twin-hulled freighter was unloading bales of . . . sea weed? . . . at the dock of an obvious plastics plant. So, he thought, most of Nyanza fished, hunted, and ranched the planet-wide ocean; this one island took the raw materials and gave back metal, chemical fuel, synthetic timbers and resins and glassites and fibres, engines. He was familiar enough with pelagic technics—most overpopulated worlds turned back at last to Mother Ocean. But here they had begun as sailors, from the very first. It should make for an interesting society. . . .

Von Sonderburg's voice jerked back his attention. "But of course, poor Freeman Bannerji was a man. I am merely referring to his, ah, his relict, poor Lady Varvara. She is an Ayres by birth, you know, the Ayres' of Antarctica. She has borne her loss with the true fortitude of Imperial aristocratic blood, yes, we can be very proud to have been directed by the late husband of Lady Varvara Ayres Bannerji."

Flandry constructed his sentence to preserve the illusion: "Do you know the precise time he died?"

"Alas, no, sir. You can speak to the City constabulary, but I fear even they would have no exact information. Sometime last night, after he retired. You understand, sir, we have not your advanced police methods here. A harpoon gun—oh, what a way to meet one's final rest!" Von Sonderburg shuddered delicately.

"The weapon has not been found?" asked Flandry impassively.

"No, I do not believe so, sir. The killer took it with him, portable, you know. He must have crept up the wall with vac-soles, or used a flung grapnel to catch the windowsill and—His Excellency was a sound sleeper and his lady, ah, preferred separate quarters. Ah . . . you can take it for granted, sir, I am certain, that the murderer did not go through the house to reach Freeman Bannerji's retiring chamber. The servants are all of Technician birth, and no Technician would *dream* of—"

The resident's mansion hove into view. It was probably 75 years old, but its metal and tinted plastic remained a blatant, arrogant leap in formal gardens, amidst a shrill huddle of tenements. As the aircar set down, Flandry noticed that the City population was mostly caucasoid, not even very dark-skinned. They were crowded together in child-pullulating streets, blowsy women waved excited arms and shouted their haggings, such of the men as did not work in industry kept grimy little shops. A pair of native constables in helmet and breastplate stood guard at the mansion gates. Those were tall Africans, who used stepped-down shockbeams with a sort of casual contempt to prevent loitering.

Lady Varvara was caucasoid herself, though the Chinese strain in the Ayres pedigree showed, in dark hair and small-boned body. She posed, exquisite in a simple white mourning gown, beside a full-length stereo of her late husband. Hurri Chundra Bannerji had been a little brown middle-aged Terran with wistful eyes: doubtless the typical fussy, rule-bound, conscientious civil servant whose dreams of a knighthood die slowly over the decades. And now he was murdered.

Flandry bowed over Lady Varvara's frail hand. "Your Ladyship," he said, "accept my most heartfelt sympathy, and grant me forgiveness that I must intrude at a moment of such loss."

"I am glad you came," she whispered. "So very glad."

It had a shaken sincerity that almost upset Flandry's court manners. He backed off with another ritual bow. "You must not trouble yourself further, your Ladyship. Let me deal with the authorities."

"Authorities!" The word was a bitter explosion among her few thin pieces of Terran crystal. Otherwise the room was dominated by the conch-whorls of an art that had not seen Earth in centuries. "What authorities? Did you bring a regiment with you?"

"No." Flandry glanced around the long low-ceilinged room. A noiseless City-bred butler had just placed decanter and glasses by the trellis-wall which opened on the garden. When he left, there did not seem to be anyone else in earshot. Flandry took out his cigarettes and raised his brows inquiringly at the woman. He saw she was younger than himself.

Her colourless lips bent into a smile. "Thank you," she said, so low he could almost not hear it.

"Eh? For what, your Ladyship? I'm afraid it's a frosty comfort to have me here."

"Oh, no," she said. She moved closer. Her reactions were not wholly natural: too calm and frank for a new-made widow, then suddenly and briefly too wild. A heavy dose of mysticine, he guessed. It was quite the thing for upper-class Imperials to erect chemical walls against grief or fear or—*What do you do when the walls come down?* he thought.

"Oh, no," repeated Lady Varvara. Her words flowed quick and high-pitched. "Perhaps you do not understand, Captain. You are the first Terran I have seen, besides my husband, for . . . how long? Something

like three Nyanzan years, and that's about four Terran. And then it was just a red-faced military legate making a routine check. Otherwise, who did we see? The City Warden and his officers paid a few courtesy calls every year. The sea chiefs had to visit us too when they happened to be on Altla . . . not for our sake, you understand, not to curry favour, only because it was beneath their dignity not to observe the formalities. *Their dignity!*" Her cheeks flamed. She stood close to him now, glaring upward; her fists drew the skin tight over bird-like knuckles. "As you would feel obliged to notice the existence of an unwelcome guest!"

"So the Empire is not popular here?" murmured Flandry.

"I don't know," she said pallidly, relaxing. "I don't know. All I know is—the only people we ever saw, with any regularity—our only friends, God help us, friends!—were the Lubbers."

"The what, my lady?"

"City people. Technicians. Pinkskins. Whatever you want to call them. Like that fat little Von Sonderburg." She was shrill again. "Do you know what it's like, Captain, to associate with no one but an inferior class? It rubs off on you. Your soul gets greasy. Von Sonderburg now . . . always toadying up to Hurri Chundra . . . he would never light a cigar in my presence without asking me, in the most heavy way—exactly the same words, I have heard them a million times, till I could scream—'Does my lady object if I have a little smoke?'"

Varvara whirled from him. Her bare shoulders shuddered. "Does my lady object? Does my lady object? And then you come, Captain—your lungs still full of Earth air, I swear—you come and take out a cigaret case and raise your eyebrows. Like that. No more. A gesture we all used at Home, a ritual, an assumption that I have eyes to see what you're doing and intelligence to know what you want—Oh, be welcome, Captain Flandry, be welcome!" She gripped the trellis with both hands and stared out into the garden. "You're from Terra," she whispered. "I'll come to you tonight, any time, right now if you want, just to repay you for being a Terran."

Flandry tapped a cigaret on his thumbnail, put it to his lips at half mast, and drew deeply. He glanced at the sad brown eyes of Hurri Chundra Bannerji and said without words: *Sorry, old chap, I'm not a ghoul, and I'll do what I can to avoid this, but my job demands I be tactful. For the Empire and the Race!*

"I'm sorry to intrude when you're overwrought, your Ladyship," he said. "Of course, I'll arrange for your passage to provincial headquarters, and if you want to return Home from there—"

"After all these years," she mumbled, "who would I know?"

"Uh . . . may I suggest, my lady, that you rest for a while—?"

An intercom chime saved both of them. Varvara said a shaky "Accept" and the connection closed. The butler's voice came; "Beg

pardon, madame, but I have just received word of a distinguished native person who has arrived. Shall I ask postponement of the formal visit?"

"Oh . . . I don't know." Varvara's tone was dead. She did not look at Flandry. "Who is it?"

"Lady Tessa Hoorn, madame, Lightmistress of Little Skua in Jainnovaunt."

III

When they reached the Zurian Current, the water, which had been a Homeric blue, turned deep purple, streaked with foam that flashed like crystallized snow. "This bends to the north beyond Iron Shoals and carries on past the Reefs of Sorrow," remarked Tessa Hoorn. "Gains us a few knots speed. Though we've naught to hurry for, have we?"

Flandry blinked through dark contact lenses at the incredible horizon. Sunlight flimmered off the multitudinous laughter of small waves. "I suppose the color is due to plankton," he said.

"Plankton-like organisms," corrected Tessa. "We're nay on Earth, Captain. But aye, off this feed the oilfish, and off them the decapus, both of use to us." She pointed. "Yonder flags bear Dilolo stripes, quartered on Saleth green: the fishing boats of the Prince of Aquant."

Flandry's dazzled eyes could hardly even see the vessels, in that merciless illumination. Since the wind dropped, the Hoorn ship had been running on its auxiliary engine and now there was no shade from the great sails. An awning was spread amidships and some superbly muscled deckhands sprawled under it, clapping time to an eerie chant-pipe, like young gods carved in oiled ebony. The Terran would have given much for some of that shadow. But since Tessa Hoorn stood here in the bows, he must submit. It was an endurance contest, he recognized, with all the advantages on her side.

"Does your nation fish this current too?" he asked.

"A little," she nodded. "But mostly we in Jainnovaunt sail west and north, with harpoons for the kraken—ha, it's a pale life never to have speared fast to a beast with more of bulk than your own ship!—and smaller game. Then T'chaka Kruger farms a great patch of beanweed in the Lesser Sargasso. And in sooth I confess, not alone the commons but some captains born will scrape the low-tide reefs for shells or dive after sporyx. Then there are carpenters, weavers, engineers, medics, machinists, all trades that must be plied: and mummers and mimes, though most such sport is given by wandering boats of actors, masterless madcap folk who come by as fancy strikes 'em." She shrugged broad shoulders. "The Commander can list you all professions in his realm if you wish it, Imperial."

Flandry regarded her with more care than pleasure. He had not yet understood her attitude. Was it contempt, or merely hatred?

The sea people of Nyanza were almost entirely African by descent, which meant that perhaps three-fourths of their ancestors had been negroid, back when more or less "pure" stocks still existed. In a world of light, more actinic than anything on Earth, reflected off water, there had been a nearly absolute selection for dark coloring: not a Nyanzan outside the city of Altla was any whiter than the ace of spades. Otherwise genes swapped around pretty freely—kinky hair, broad noses, and full lips were the rule, but with plenty of exceptions. Tessa's hair formed a soft, tightly curled coif around her ears; her nostrils flared, in a wide arch-browed face, but the bridge was aquiline. Without her look of inbred haughtiness, it would have been a wholly beautiful face. The rest of her was even more stunning, almost as tall as Flandry, full-breasted, slim-waisted, and muscled like a Siamese cat. She wore merely a gold medallion of rank on her forehead, a belt with a knife, and the inevitable aqua-lung on her back . . . which left plenty on view to admire. But even in plumes and gown and rainbow cloak, she had been a walking shout as she entered the resident's mansion.

However, thought Dominic Flandry, that word "stunning" can be taken two ways. I am not about to make a pass at the Lightmistress of Little Skua.

He asked cautiously: "Where are the Technicians from?"

"Oh, those." A faint sneer flickered on her red mouth. "Well, see you, the firstcomers here settled on Altla, but then as more folk came in, space was lacking, so they began to range the sea. That proved so much better a life that erelong few cared to work on land. So sith the positions stood open, ai-hai!—it swarmed in with dirt-loving men and their shes. Most came from Deutschwelt, as it happened. When we had enough of yon ilk, and knew they'd breed, we closed the sluice, for they dare nay work as sailors, they get skin sicknesses, and Altla has little room."

"I should think they'd be powerful on the planet, what with the essential refineries and—"

"Nay, Captain. Altla and all thereon is owned in common by the *true* Nyanzan nations. The Technicians are but hirelings. Though in sooth, they've a sticky way with money and larger bank accounts than many a skipper. That's why we bar them from owning ships."

Flandry glanced down at himself. He had avoided the quasi-uniform of the despised class and had packed outfits of blouse, slacks, zori, and sash for himself; the winged cap sat on his head bearing the sunburst of Empire. But he could not evade the obvious fact, that his own culture was more Lubberly than pelagic. And an Imperial agent was often hated, but must never allow himself to be despised. Hence Flandry cocked a brow (*Sardonic Expression 22-C*, he thought) and drawled:

"I see. You're afraid that, being more intelligent, they'd end up owning every ship on the planet."

He could not see if she flushed, under the smooth black sweat-gleaming

skin, but her lips drew back and one hand clapped to her knife. He thought that the sea bottom was no further away than a signal to her crew. Finally she exclaimed, "Is it the new fashion on Terra to insult a hostess? Well you know it's nay a matter of inborn brain, but of skill. The Lubbers are reared from birth to handle monies. But how many of 'em can handle a rigging—or even name the lines? Can you?"

Flandry's unfairness had been calculated. So was his refusal to meet her reply squarely. "Well," he said, "the Empire tries to respect local law and custom. Only the most uncivilized practices are not tolerated."

It stung her, she bridled. Most colonials were violently sensitive to their isolation from the Galactic mainstream. They did not see that their own societies were not backward on that account—were often healthier—and the answer to that lay buried somewhere in the depths of human unreasonableness. But the fact could be used.

Having angered her enough, Flandry finished coldly: "And, of course, the Empire cannot tolerate treasonable conspiracies."

Tessa Hoorn answered him in a strained voice, "Captain, there's nay conspiring here. Free-born folk are honest with foemen, too. It's you who put on slyness. For see you, I happened by Altla homebound from The Kraal, and visited yon mansion for courtoisie sake. When you asked passage to Jairnovaunt, I granted it, sith such is nay refused among ocean people. But well I knew you fared with me, liefer than fly the way in an hour or two, so you could draw me out and spy on me. And you've nay been frank as to your reasons for guesting my country." Her deep tones became a growl. "That's Lubber ways! You'll nay get far 'long your mission, speaking for a planet of Lubbers and Lubber-lovers!"

She drew her knife, looked at it, and clashed it back into the sheath. Down on the quarterdeck, the crewmen stirred, a ripple of panther bodies. It grew so quiet that Flandry heard the steady snore of the bow through murmurous waves, and the lap-lap on the hull, and the creak of spars up in the sky.

He leaned back against a blistering bulwark and said with care: "I'm going to Jairnovaunt because a boy died holding my hand. I want to find his parents. . . ." He offered her a cigaret, and helped himself when she shook her head. "But I'm not going just to extend my personal sympathies. Imperial expense accounts are not quite that elastic. For that matter, while we're being honest, I admit I'd hardly invite Bubbles or Flutters to my own house."

He blew smoke; it was almost invisible in the flooding light. "Maybe you wouldn't conspire behind anyone's back, m'lady. Come to think of it who would conspire in front of anyone's face? But somebody on Nyanza is hatching a very nasty egg. That kid didn't sign up when the Imperial recruiter stopped by for glory or money: he enlisted to learn modern militechnics, with the idea of turning them against the Empire.

And he died in trampled snow, sniped by a local patriot *he* was chasing. Who lured that young fellow out to die, Lightmistress? And who sneaked up a wall and harpooned a harmless little lonely bureaucrat in his sleep? Rather more to the point, who sent that murderer-by-stealth, and why? Really, this is a pretty slimy business all around. I should think you'd appreciate my efforts to clean it off your planet."

Tessa bit her lip. At last, not meeting his shielded gaze, she said, "I'm nay wise of any such plots, Captain. I won't speak 'loud 'gainst your Empire—my thoughts are my own, but it's true we've nay suffered much more than a resident and some taxes—"

"Which were doubtless higher when every nation maintained its own defences," said Flandry. "Yes, we settle for a single man on worlds like this. We'd actually like to have more, because enough police could smell out trouble before it's grown too big, and could stop the grosser barbarities left over from independent days—"

Again she bristled. He said in a hurry: "No, please, for once that's not meant to irritate. By and large, Nyanza looks as if it's always been quite a humane place. If you don't use all the latest technological gimcrackery, it's because it's non-functional in this culture, not because you've forgotten what your ancestors knew. I'm just enough of a jackleg engineer to see that these weird-looking sails of yours are aerodynamic marvels; I'm certain that paraboloidal jib uses the Venturi effect with malice aforethought. Your language is grammatically archaic but semantically efficient. I can envision some of the bucolic poets at court going into raptures over your way of life. And getting seasick if they tried it, but that's another story. . . . Therefore," he finished soberly, "I'm afraid I'm a little more sympathetic to Hurri Chundra Bannerji, who fussed about and established extrasystemic employment contacts for your more ambitious young men and built breakwaters and ordered vaccines and was never admitted to your clubs, than I am sorry for you."

She looked over the side, into curling white and purple water, and said very low, "The Empire was nay asked here."

"Neither was anyone else. The Terran Empire established itself in this region first. The Merseian Empire would be a rather more demanding master—if only because it's still vigorous, expansive, virtuous, and generally uncorrupted, while Terra is the easy-going opposite." That brought her up sharply in astonishment, as he had expected. "Since the Empire must protect its frontiers, lest Terra herself be clobbered out of the sky, we're going to stay. It would not be advisable for some young Nyanzan firebrains to try harpooning space dreadnaughts. Anyone who provokes such gallant idiocy is an enemy of yours as well as mine."

Her eyes were moody upon his. After a long time she asked him, "Captain, have you ever swum undersea?"

"I've done a little skindiving for fun," he said, taken aback. He had

spoken half honestly and half meretriciously, never quite sure which sentence was one or another, and thought he had touched the proper keys. But this surprised him.

"Nay more? And you stand all 'lone on a world that's aloof of you where it doesn't, perchance, scheme murder? Captain, I repent me what I said 'bout your folk being Lubbers."

The relief was like a wave of weakness. Flandry sucked in his cheeks around his cigaret and answered lightly: "They cannot do worse than shoot me, which would distress only my tailor and my vintner. Have you ever heard that the coward dies a thousand deaths, the hero dies but once?"

"Aye."

"Well, after the 857th death I get bored with it."

She laughed and he continued a line of banter, so habitual by now that most of him thought on other affairs. Not that he seriously expected the Lightmistress of Little Skua to become bodily accessible to him; he had gathered an impression of a chaste folk. But the several days' voyage to Jainnovaunt could be made very pleasant by a small shipboard flirtation, and he would learn a great deal more than if his fellow voyagers were hostile. For instance, whether the imported wine he had noticed in the galley was preferable to native seaberry gin. He had not been truthful in claiming indifference whether he lived or died: not while a supple young woman stood clad in sunlight, and blooded horses stamped on the ringing plains of Ilion, and smoke curled fragrant about coffee and cognac on Terra. But half the pleasure came from these things being staked against darkness.

IV

A tide was flowing when they reached Jainnovaunt, and all the rocks, and the housings upon them, were meters under the surface. The Hoorn ship steered a way between pennant-gay buoys to one of the anchored floating docks. There swarmed the sea people, snorting like porpoises among moored hulls or up like squirrels in tall masts. Fish were being unloaded and sails repaired and engines overhauled, somewhere a flute and a drum underlay a hundred deep voices chanting *Way-o* as bare feet stamped out a rigadoon. Flandry noticed how silence spread ripple-fashion from the sight of him. But he followed Tessa overboard as soon as her vessel was secured.

No Nyanzan was ever far from his aqua-lung. They seemed to have developed a more advanced model here than any Flandry had seen elsewhere: a transparent helmet and a small capacitance-battery device worn on the back, which electrolyzed oxygen directly from the water and added enough helium from a high-compression tank to dilute. By regulating the partial pressures of the gases, one could go quite deep.

This was only a short swim, as casual as a Terran's stroll across the bridgeway. Slanting through clear greenish coolth, Flandry saw that Jainnovaunt was large—sunken domes and towers gleamed farther than his vision reached. Work went on: a cargo submarine, with a score of human midges flitting about it, discharged kelpite bales into a warehouse tube. But there were also children darting among the eerie spires and grottos of a coraloid park, an old man scattered seeds for a school of brilliant-striped little fish, a boy and a girl swam hand in hand through voiceless wonder.

When he reached the long white hall of the Commander, Jainnovaunt's hereditary chief executive, Flandry was still so bemused by the waving, fronded formal gardens that he scarcely noticed how graceful the portico was. Even the airlock which admitted him blended into the over-all pattern, a curiously disturbing one to the Terran mind, for it contrasted delicate traceries and brutal masses as if it were the ocean itself.

When the water had been pumped out, an airblast dried them, Flandry's shimmerite clothes as well as Tessa's sleek skin. They stepped into a hallway muraled with heroic abstractions. Beyond two guards bearing the ubiquitous harpoon rifles, and beyond an emergency bulkhead, the passage opened on a great circular chamber lined with malachite pillars under a clear dome. Some two-score Nyanzans stood about. Their ages seemed to range upward from 20 or so; some wore only a lung, others a light coloured shirt and kilt; all bore dignity like a mantle. Quite a few were women, gowned and plumed if they were clothed at all, but otherwise as free and proud as their men.

Tessa stepped forward and saluted crisply. "The Lightmistress of Little Skua, returning from The Kraal as ordered, sir."

Commander Inyanduma III was a powerfully built, heavy-faced man with greying woolly hair: his medallion of rank was tattooed, a golden Pole Star bright on his brows. "Be welcome," he said, "and likewise your guest. He is now ours. I call his name holy."

The Terran flourished a bow. "An honour, sir. I am Captain Dominic Flandry, Imperial Navy. Lightmistress Hoorn was gracious enough to conduct me here."

He met the Commander's eyes steadily, but placed himself so he could watch Tessa on his edge of vision. Inyanduma tipped an almost imperceptible inquiring gesture toward her. She nodded, ever so faintly, and made a short-lived O with thumb and forefinger. *I'd already wormed out that she went to The Kraal on official business, remembered Flandry, but she wouldn't say what and only now will she even admit it succeeded. Too secret to mention on her ship's radiophone! As human beings, we enjoyed each other's company, travelling here. But as agents of our kings—?*

Inyanduma swept a sailor's muscular hand about the room. "You see our legislative leaders, Captain. When the Lightmistress phoned you

were hither-bound, we supposed it was because of his Excellency's slaying, which had been broadcast 'round the globe. It's a grave matter, so I gathered our chiefs of council, from both the House of Men and the Congress of Women."

A rustling and murmuring went about the green columns under the green sea. There was withdrawal in it, and a sullen waiting. These were not professional politicians as Terra knew the breed. These were the worthies of Jairnovaunt: aristocrats and shipowners, holding seats *ex officio*, and a proportion of ships' officers elected by the commons. Even the nobles were functional—Tessa Hoorn had inherited not the right but the duty to maintain lightships and communications about the reefs called Little Skua. They had all faced more storms and underwater teeth than they had debate.

Flandry said evenly: "My visit concerns worse than a murder, sir and gentles. A resident might be killed by any disgruntled individual, that's an occupational hazard. But I don't think one living soul hated Bannerji personally. And that's what's damnable!"

"Are you implying treason, sir?" rumbled Inyanduma.

"I am, sir. With more lines of evidence than one. Could anybody direct me to a family named Umbolu?"

It stirred and hissed among the councillors of Jairnovaunt. And then a young man trod forth—a huge young man with a lion's gait, craggy features and a scar on one cheek. "Aye," he said so it rang in the hall. "I light Derek Umbolu, captain of the kraken-chaser *Bloemfontein*. Tessa, why brought you a damned Impy hither?"

"Belay!" rapped Inyanduma. "We'll show courtoisie here."

Tessa exclaimed to the giant: "Derek, Derek, he could have flown to us in an hour! And we meditate nay rebellion—" Her voice trailed off; she stepped back from his smouldering gaze, her own eyes widening and a hand stealing to her mouth. The unspoken question shivered, *Do we?*

"Let 'em keep 'way from us!" growled Derek Umbolu. "We'll pay the tribute and hold to the bloody Pax if they'll leave us and our old ways 'lone. But they don't!"

Flandry stepped into collective horror. "I'm not offended," he said. "But neither do I make policy. Your complaints against the local administration should be taken to the provincial governor—"

"Yon murdering quog!" spat Derek. "I've heard about Brae, and more."

Since Flandry considered the description admirable (he assumed a quog was not a nice animal) he said hastily: "I must warn you against *lèse majesté*. And now let's get to my task. It's not very pleasant for me either. Captain Umbolu, are you related to an Imperial marine named Thomas?"

"Aye. I've a younger brother who 'listed for a five-year hitch."

Flandry's tones gentled. "I'm sorry. It didn't strike me you might be so closely— Thomas Umbolu was killed in action on Brae."

Derek closed his eyes. One great hand clamped on the hilt of his sheath knife till blood trickled from beneath the nails. He looked again at the world and said thickly: "You came here swifter than the official news, Captain."

"I saw him die," said Flandry. "He went like a brave man."

"You've nay crossed space just to tell a colonial that much."

"No," said Flandry. "I would like to speak alone with you sometime soon. And with his other kin."

The broad black chest pumped air, the hard fingers curved into stiff claws. Derek Umbolu rasped forth: "You'll nay torment my father with your devilments, nor throw shame on us with your secrecy. Ask it out here, 'fore 'em all."

Flandry's shoulder muscles tightened, as if expecting a bullet. He looked to the Commander. Inyanduma's starred face was like obsidian. Flandry said: "I have reason to believe Thomas Umbolu was implicated in a reasonable conspiracy. Of course, I could be wrong, in which case I'll apologize. But I must first put a great many questions. I am certainly not going to perform before an audience. I'll see you later."

"You'll leave my father be or I'll kill you!"

"Belay!" cried Inyanduma. "I said he was a guest." More softly: "Go, Derek, and tell Old John what you must."

The giant saluted, wheeled, and stalked from the room. Flandry saw tears glimmer in Tessa's eyes. The Commander bowed ponderously at him. "Crave your pardon, sir. He's a stout heart . . . surely you'll find nay treason in his folk . . . but the news you bore was harsh."

Flandry made some reply. The gathering became decorous, the Light-masters and Coastwatchers offered him polite conversation. He felt reasonably sure that few of them knew about any plottings: revolutions didn't start that way.

Eventually he found himself in a small but tastefully furnished bedroom. One wall was a planetary map. He studied it, looking for a place called Uhunhu. He found it near the Sheikhdum of Rossala, which lay north of here; if he read the symbols aright, it was a permanently submerged area.

A memory snapped into his consciousness. He swore for two unrepeatable minutes before starting a chain of cigarets. If that was the answer—

V

The inner moon, though smaller, raised the largest tides, up to nine times a Terrestrial high; but it moved so fast, five orbits in two of Nyanza's 30-hour days, that the ebb was spectacularly rapid. Flandry

heard a roar through his wall, switched on the transparency, and saw water tumbling from dark rough rock. It was close to sunset, he had sat in his thoughts for hours. A glance at the electric ephemerides over his bunk told him that Loa, the outer satellite, would not dunk the hall till midnight. And that was a much weaker flow, without the whirlpool effects which were dangerous for a lower-case lubber like himself.

He stubbed out his cigaret and sighed. *Might as well get the nasty part over with.* Rising, he shucked all clothes but a pair of trunks and a 'lung; he put on the swim-shoes given him and buckled his guns—they were safely waterproof—into their holsters. A directory-map of the immediate region showed him where Captain John Umbolu lived. He recorded a message that business called him out and his host should not wait dinner: he felt sure Inyanduma would be more relieved than offended. Then he stepped through the airlock. It closed automatically after him.

Sunset blazed across violet waters. The white spume of the breakers was turned an incredible gold; tide pools on the naked black skerry were like molten copper. The sky was deep blue in the east, still pale overhead, shading to a clear cloudless green where the sun drowned. Through the surf's hollow crashing and grinding, Flandry heard bells from one of the many rose-red spires . . . or did a ship's bell ring among raking spars, or was it something he had heard in a dream once? Beneath all the noise, it was unutterably peaceful.

No one bothered with boats for such short distances. Flandry entered the water at a sheltered spot, unfolded the web feet in his shoes, and struck out between the scattered, dome-and-towered reefs. Other heads bobbed in the little warm waves, but none paid him attention. He was glad of that. Steering a course by marked buoys, he found old Umbolu's house after a few energetic minutes.

It was on a long thin rock, surrounded by lesser stones on which a murderous fury exploded. The Terran paddled carefully around, in search of a safe approach. He found it, two natural breakwaters formed by gaunt rusty coraloid pinnacles, with a path that led upward through gardens now sodden heaps until it struck the little hemisphere. Twilight was closing in, slow and deeply blue; an evening planet came to white life in the west.

Flandry stepped on to the beach under the crags. It was dark there. He did not know what reflex of deadly years saved him. A man glided from behind one of the high spires and fired a harpoon. Flandry dropped on his stomach before he had seen more than a metallic glitter. The killing missile hissed where he had been.

"If you please!" He rolled over, yanking for his sleepy-needle gun. A night-black panther shape sprang toward him. His pistol was only half unlimbered when the hard body fell upon his. One chopping,

wrist-numbing karate blow sent the weapon a-clatter from his grasp. He saw a bearded, hating face behind a knife.

Flandry blocked the stab with his left arm. The assassin pulled his blade back. Before it could return, Flandry's thumb went after the nearest eye. His opponent should have ignored that distraction for the few necessary moments of slicing time—but, instead, grabbed the Terran's wrist with his own free hand. Flandry's right hand was still weak, but he delivered a rabbit punch of sorts with it and took his left out of hock by jerking past his enemy's thumb. Laying both hands and a knee against the man's knife arm, he set about breaking same.

The fellow screeched, writhed, and wriggled free somehow. Both bounced to their feet. The dagger lay between them. The Nyanzan dived after it. Flandry put his foot on the blade. "Finders keepers," he said. He kicked the scrabbling man behind the ear and drew his blaster.

The Nyanzan did not stay kicked. Huddled at Flandry's knees, he threw a sudden shoulder block. The Terran went over on his backside. He glimpsed the lean form as it rose and leaped; it was in the water before he had fired.

After the thunder-crash had echoed to naught and no body had emerged, Flandry retrieved his needler. Slowly, his breathing and pulse eased. "That," he confessed aloud, "was as ludicrous a case of mutual ineptitude as the gods of slapstick ever engineered. We both deserve to be tickled to death by small green centipedes. Well . . . if you keep quiet about it, I will."

He squinted through the dusk at the assassin's knife. It was an ordinary rustproof blade, but the bone hilt carried an unfamiliar inlaid design. And had he ever before seen a Nyanzan with a respectable growth of beard?

He went on up the path and pressed the house bell. The airlock opened for him and he entered.

The place had a ship's neatness, and it was full of models, scrimshaw, stuffed fish, all the sailor souvenirs. But emptiness housed in it. One old man sat alone with his dead; there was no one else.

John Umbolu looked up through dim eyes and nodded. "Aye," he said. "I 'waited you, Captain. Be welcome and be seated."

Flandry lowered himself to a couch covered with the soft-scaled hide of some giant swimming thing John Umbolu had once hunted down. The leather was worn shabby. The old man limped to him with a decanter of imported rum. When they had both been helped, he sat himself in a massive arm-chair and their goblets clinked together. "Your honour and good health, sir," said John Umbolu.

Flandry looked into the wrinkled face and said quietly: "Your son Derek must have told you my news."

"I've had the tidings," nodded Umbolu. He took a pipe from its rack and began to fill it with slow careful motions. "You saw him die, sir?"

"He held my hand. His squad was ambushed on a combat mission on Brae. He . . . it was soon over."

"Drowning is the single decent death," whispered the Nyanzan. "My other children, all but Derek, had that much luck." He lit his pipe and blew smoke for a while. "I'm sorry Tom had to go yon way. But it is kind of you to come tell me of it."

"He'll be buried with full military honours," said Flandry awkwardly. *If they don't have so many corpses they just bulldoze them under.* "Or if you wish, instead of the battle-casualty bonus you can have his ashes returned here."

"Nay," said Umbolu. His white head wove back and forth. "What use is that? Let me have the money, to build a reef beacon in his name." He thought for a while longer, then said timidly: "Perchance I could call further on your kindness. Would you know if . . . you're 'ware, sir, soldiers on leave and the girls they meet . . . it's possible Tom left a child somewhere. . . ."

"I'm sorry, I wouldn't know how to find out about that."

"Well, well, I expected nay more. Derek must be wed soon then, if the name's to live."

Flandry drew hard on a cigaret, taken from a waterproof case. He got out: "I have to tell you what your son said as he lay dying."

"Aye. Say forth, and fear me nay. Shall the fish blame the hook if it hurts him a little?"

Flandry related it. At the end, the old man's eyes closed, just as Derek's had done, and he let the empty glass slip from his fingers.

Finally: "I know naught of this. Will you believe that, Captain?"

"Yes, sir," Flandry answered.

"You fear Derek may be caught in the same net?"

"I hope not."

"I too. I'd nay have any son of mine in a scheme that works by midnight murder—whatever they may think of your Empire. Tom . . . Tom was young and didn't understand what was involved. Will you believe that too?" asked John Umbolu anxiously. Flandry nodded. The Nyanzan dropped his head and cupped his hands about the pipe bowl, as if for warmth. "But Derek . . . why, Derek's in the Council. Derek would have open eyes— Let it nay be so!"

Flandry left him with himself for a time, then: "Where might any young man . . . first have encountered the agents of such a conspiracy?"

"Who knows, sir? 'Fore his growth is gained, an Umbolu boy has shipped all ports of the planet. Or there are always sailors from every nation on Nyanza, right here in Jairnovaunt."

Flandry held out the knife he had taken. "This belongs to a bearded man," he said. "Can you tell me anything about it?"

The faded eyes peered close. "Rossala work." It was an instant

recognition, spoken in a lifeless voice. "And the Rossala men flaunt whiskers."

"As I came ashore here," said Flandry, "a bearded person with this knife tried to kill me. He got away, but—"

He stopped. The old sea captain had risen. Flandry looked up at an incandescent mask of rage, and suddenly he realized that John Umbolu was a very big man.

Gigantic fists clenched over the Terran's head. The huge voice roared like thunder, one majestic oath after the next, until rage at last found meaningful words. "Sneak assassins on my very ground! 'Gainst my guest! By the blazing bones of Almighty God, sir, you'll let me question every Rossalan in Jairnovaunt and flay yon one 'live!'"

Flandry rose too. An upsurging eagerness tingled in him, a new-born plot. And at the same time—*Warily, child, warily! You'll not get co-operation at this counter without some of the most weasel-like arguments and shameless emotional button-pushing in hell's three-volume thesaurus.*

Well, he thought, that's what I get paid for.

VI

Hours had gone when he left the house. He had eaten there, but sheer weariness dragged at him. He swam quite slowly back to the Commander's rock. When he stood on it, he rested for a while, looking over the sea.

Loa was up, Luna-sized, nearly full, but with several times the abledo of Earth's moon. High in a clear blackness, it drowned most of the alien constellations. The marker lights about every rock, color-coded for depth so that all Jairnovaunt was one great jewel-box, grew pallid in the moon-dazzle off the ocean.

Flandry took out a cigaret. It was enough to be alone with that light: at least, it helped. Imperial agents ought to have some kind of conscience-ectomy performed. . . . He drew smoke into his lungs.

"Can you nay rest, Captain?"

The low woman-voice brought him bounding around. When he saw the moonlight gleam off Tessa Hoorn, he put back his gun, sheepishly.

"You seem a wee bit wakeful yourself," he answered. "Unless you are sleep-walking, or sleep-diving or whatever people do here. But no, surely I am the one asleep. Don't rouse me."

The moon turned her into darkneses and lithe witcheries, with great marching waters to swirl beneath her feet. She had been swimming—Loa glistened off a million cool drops, her only garment. He remembered how they had talked and laughed and traded songs and recollections and

even hopes, under tall skies or moonlit sails. His heart stumbled, and glibness died.

"Aye. My net would nay hold fast to sleep this night." She stood before him, eyes lowered. It was the first time she had not met his gaze. In the streaming unreal light, he saw how a pulse fluttered in her throat. "So I wended from my bunk and—" The tones faded.

"Why did you come here again?" he asked.

"Oh . . . it was a place to steer for. Or perchance. . . . Nay!" her lips tried to smile, but were not quite steady. "Where were you this evening, sith we are so curious?"

"I spoke to Old John," he said, because so far truth would serve his purpose. "It wasn't easy."

"Aye. I wouldn't give your work to an enemy, Dominic. Why do you do it?"

He shrugged. "It's all I really know how to do."

"Nay!" she protested. "To aid a brute of a governor or a null of a resident—you're too much a man. You could come . . . here, even—Nay, the sun wouldn't allow it for long. . . ."

"It's not quite for nothing," he said. "The Empire is—" he grinned forlornly—"less perfect than myself. True. But what would replace it is a great deal worse."

"Are you so sure, Dominic?"

"No," he said in bitterness.

"You could dwell on a frontier world and do work you are sure is worth yourself. I . . . even I have thought, there is more in this universe than Nyanza . . . if such a planet had oceans, I could—"

Flandry said frantically: "Didn't you mention having a child, Tessa?"

"Aye, a Commander-child, but sith I'm unwed as yet the boy was adopted out." He looked his puzzlement and she explained, as glad as he to be impersonal: "The Commander must not wed, but lies with whom he will. It's a high honor, and if she be husbandless the woman gets a great dowry from him. The offspring of these unions are raised by the mothers' kin; when they are all old enough, the councillors elect the best-seeming son heir apparent."

Somewhere in his rocking brain, Flandry thought that the Terran Emperors could learn a good deal from Nyanza. He forced a chuckle and said: "Why, that makes you the perfect catch, Tessa—titled, rich, and the mother of a potential chieftain. How did you escape so far?"

"There was nay the right man," she whispered. "Inyanduma himself is so much a man, see you, for all his years. Only Derek Umbolu—how you unlock me, Terran!—and him too proud to wed 'bove his station." She caught her breath and blurted desperately: "But I'm nay more a maid, and I will nay wait until Full Entropy to be again a woman."

Flandry could have mumbled something and gotten the devil out of there. But he remembered through a brawling in his blood that he was

an Imperial agent and that something had been done by this girl in southern waters which they kept secret from him.

He kissed her.

She responded shyly at first, and then with a hunger that tore at him. They sat for a long while under the moon, needing no words, until Flandry felt with dim surprise that the tide was licking his feet.

Tessa rose. "Come to my house," she said.

It was the moment when he must be a reptile-blooded scoundrel . . . or perhaps a parfait gentil knight, he was desolately uncertain which. He remained seated, looking up at her, where she stood crowned with stars, and said:

"I'm sorry. It wouldn't do."

"Fear me naught," she said with a small catch of laughter, very close to a sob. "You can leave when you will. I'd nay have a man who wouldn't stay freely. But I'll do my best to keep you, Dominic, dearest."

He fumbled after another cigaret. "Do you think I'd like anything better?" he said. "But there's a monster loose on this planet, I'm all but sure of it. I will not give you just a few hours with half my mind on my work. Afterward—" He left it unfinished.

She stood quiet for a time that stretched.

"It's for Nyanza too," he pleaded. "If this goes on unreined, it could be the end of your people."

"Aye," she said in a flat tone.

"You could help me. When this mission is finished—"

"Well . . . what would you know?" She twisted her face away from his eyes.

He got the cigaret lighted and squinted through the smoke. "What were you doing in The Kraal?"

"I'm nay so sure now that I do love you, Dominic."

"Will you tell me, so I'll know what I have to face?"

She sighed. "Rossala is arming. They are making warcraft, guns, torpedoes—none nuclear, sith we have nay facilities for it, but more than the Terran law allows us. I dou't know why, though rumor speaks of sunken Uuhuhu. The Sheikh guards his secrets. But there are whispers of freedom. It may or may not be sooth. We'll nay make trouble with the Imperium for fellow Nyauzans, but . . . we arm ourselves too, in case Rossala should start again the old wars. I arranged an alliance with The Kraal."

"And if Rossala should not attack you, but revolt against Terra?" asked Flandry. "What would your own re-armed alliance do?"

"I know naught 'bout that. I am but one Nyanzan. Have you nay gained enough?"

She slammed down her 'lung helmet and dived off the edge. He did not see her come up again.

VII

With a whole planetful of exotic sea foods to choose from, the Commander hospitably breakfasted his guest on imported beefsteak. Flandry walked out among morning tide pools, through a gusty salt wind, and waited in grimness and disgruntlement for events to start moving.

He was a conspicuous figure in his iridescent white garments, standing alone on a jut of rock with the surf leaping at his feet. A harpoon gunner could have fired upward from the water and disappeared. Flandry did not take his eyes off the blue and green whitecaps beyond the breakers. His mind dwelt glumly on Tessa Hoorn . . . God damn it, he would go home by way of Morvan and spend a week in its pleasure city and put it all on the expense account. What was the use of this struggle to keep a decaying civilization from being eaten alive, if you never got a chance at any of the decadence yourself?

A black shape crossed his field of vision. He poised, warily. The man swam like a seal, but straight into the surf. There were sharp rocks in that cauldron—hold it!—Derek Umbolu beat his way through, grasped the wet stone edge Flandry stood on, and chinned himself up. He pushed back his helmet with a crash audible over the sea-thunder and loomed above Flandry like a basalt cliff. His eyes went downward 30 centimetres to lock with the Terran's, and he snarled:

"What have you done to her?"

"My Lady Hoorn?" Flandry asked. "Unfortunately, nothing."

A fist cocked. "You lie, Lubber! I know the lass. I saw her this dawn and she had been weeping."

Flandry smiled lop-sided. "And I am necessarily to blame? Don't you flatter me a bit? She spoke rather well of you, Captain."

A shiver went through the huge body. Derek stepped back one pace; teeth caught at his lip. "Say nay more," he muttered.

"I'd have come looking for you today," said Flandry. "We still have a lot to talk about. Such as the man who tried to kill me last night."

Derek spat. "A pity he didn't succeed!"

"Your father thought otherwise, seeing the attempt was made on his own rock. He was quite indignant."

Derek's eyes narrowed his nostrils stirred, like an angry bull's, and his head slanted forward. "So you spoke to my father after all, did you, now? I warned you, Impy—"

"We had a friendly sort of talk," said Flandry. "*He* doesn't believe anything can be gained by shooting men in their sleep."

"I suppose all your own works would stand being refereed?"

Since they would certainly not, Flandry donned a frown and continued: "I'd keep an eye on your father, though. I've seen these dirty little fanaticisms before. Among the first people to be butchered are the

native-born who keep enough native sense and honour to treat the Imperial like a fellow-being. You see, such people are, too likely to understand that the revolution is really organized by some rival imperialism, and that you can't win a war where your own home is the battleground.

"Arrgh!" A hoarse animal noise, for no words were scornful enough.

"And my would-be assassin is still in business," continued Flandry. "He knows I did talk to your father. Hate me as much as you like, Captain Umbolu, but keep a guard over the old gentleman. Or at least speak to a certain Rossalan whom I don't accuse you of knowing."

For a moment longer the brown eyes blazed against the glacial gray blandness of the Terran's. Then Derek clashed his helmet down and returned to the water.

Flandry sighed. He really should start the formal machinery of investigation, but— He went back to the house with an idea of borrowing some fishing tackle.

Inyanduma, seated at a desk among the inevitable documents of government, gave him a troubled look. "Are you certain that there is a real conspiracy on Nyanza?" he asked. "We've ever had our hotheads, like all others . . . aye, I've seen other planets, I listed for the space Navy in my day and hold a reserve commission."

Flandry sat down and looked at his fingernails. "Then why haven't you reported what you know about Rossala?" he asked softly.

Inyanduma started. "Are you a telepath?"

"No. It'd make things too dull." Flandry lit a fresh cigaret. "I know Rossala is arming, and that your nation is alarmed enough about it to prepare defensive weapons and alliances. Since the Empire would protect you, you must expect the Empire to be kicked off Nyanza."

"Nay," whispered Inyanduma. "We've nay certainty of aught. It's but . . . we won't bring a horde of detectives, belike a Terran military force, by denouncing our fellow nation . . . on so little proof. . . . And yet we must keep some freedom of action, in case—"

"Especially in case Rossala calls on you to join in cutting the Terran apron strings?"

"Nay, nay—"

"Under other circumstances it would be pathetic." Flandry shook his tongue-clicking head. "It's so amateurishly done that I feel grossly overpaid for my time here. But whoever engineered the conspiracy in the first place is no amateur. He used your parochial loyalties with skill. And he must expect to move soon, before a pre-occupied Imperium can find out enough about his arrangements to justify sending in the marines. The resident's assassination is obviously a key action. It was chance I got here the very day that had happened, but someone like me would surely have arrived not many days later, and not been a great deal longer about learning as much as I've done. Of course, if they can

kill me it will delay matters for a while, which will be helpful to them; but they don't seem to expect they'll need much time."

Flandry paused, nodded to himself, and carried on. "Ergo, if this affair is not stopped, we can expect Rossala to revolt within a few weeks at the very latest. Rossala will call on the other Nyanzan nations to help—and they've been cleverly maneuvered into arming themselves and setting up a skeleton military organization. If the expert I suspect is behind the revolution, those leaders such as yourself, who demur at the idea, will die and be replaced by more gullible ones. Of course, Nyanza will have been promised outside help: I don't imagine even Derek Umbolu thinks one planet can stand off all Terra's power. Merseia is not too far away. If everything goes smoothly, we'll end up with a nominally independent Nyanza which is actually a Merseian puppet—deep within Terran space. If the attempt fails, well, what's one more radioactive wreck of a world to Merseia?"

There was a stillness.

In the end Inyanduma said grayly: "I don't know but what the hazard you speak of will be better than to call in the Terrans; for in sooth all our nations have broken your law in that we have gathered weapons as you say. The Imperials would nay leave us what self-government we now have."

"They might not be necessary," said Flandry. "Since you do have those weapons, and the City constabulary is a legally armed native force with some nuclear equipment . . . you could do your own housecleaning. I could supervise the operation, make sure it was thorough, stamp my report to headquarters Fantastically Secret, and that would be the close of the affair."

He stood up. "Think it over," he said. . . .

It was peaceful out on the rock. Flandry's reel hummed, the lure flashed through brilliant air, the surf kittened gigantically with his hook. It did not seem to matter greatly that he got never a nibble. The tide began to rise again, he'd have to go inside or exchange his rod for a trident. . . .

A kayak came over drowned skerries like something alive. Derek Umbolu brought it to Flandry's feet and looked up. His face was seawet, which was merciful; Flandry did not want to know whether the giant was crying.

"Blood," croaked Derek. "Blood, and the chairs broken, I could see in the blood how he was dragged out and thrown to the fish."

Hollowness lay in Dominic Flandry's heart. He felt his shoulders slump. "I'm sorry," he said. "Oh, God, I'm sorry."

Words ripped out, flat, hurried, under the ramping tidal noise:

"They center in Rossala, but someone in Uhundu captains it. I was to seize control here when they rise, if Inyanduma will nay let us help

the revolution. I hated the killing of old Bannerji, but it was needful. For now there will be nay effective space traffic control, till they replace him, and in two weeks there will come ships from Merseia with heavy nuclear war-weapons such as we can't make on this planet. The same man who gaffed Bannerji tried for you. He was the only trained assassin in Jainnovaunt—and a neighbor gave you alibi—so I believed none of his whinings that he'd nay touched my father. His name was Mamoud Shufi. Cursèd be it till the sun is cold clinkers!"

One great black hand unzipped the kayak cover. The other hand swooped down, pulled out something which dripped, and flung it at the Terran's feet so hard that one dead eye burst from the lopped-off head.

VIII

Elsewhere on Nyanza it growled battle, men spread and shot each other, ships went to the bottom and buildings cracked open like rotten fruit. Where Flandry stood was only turquoise and lace. Perhaps some of the high white clouds banked in the west had a smoky tinge.

A crewman with a portable sonic fathometer nodded. "We're over Uhunhu shoals now, sir."

"Stop the music," said Flandry. The skipper transmitted several orders, he felt the pulse of engines die, the submarine lay quiet. Looking down gray decks past the shark's fin of a conning tower, Flandry saw crewmen gathering in a puzzled, almost resentful way. They had expected to join the fighting, till this Terran directed the ship eastward.

"And now," said Derek Ombolu grimly, "will you have the kindness to say why we steered clear of Rossala?"

Flandry cocked an eyebrow. "Why are you so anxious to kill other men?" he countered.

Derek bristled. "I'm nay afraid to hazard my skin, Impy . . . like some I could name!"

"There's more to it than that," said Flandry. He was not sure why he prattled cheap psychology when a monster crouched under his feet. Postponing the moment? He glanced at Tessa Hoorn, who had insisted on coming. "Do you see what I mean, Lightmistress? Do you know why he itches so to loose his harpoon?"

Some of the chill she had shown him in the past week thawed. "Aye," she said. "Belike I do. It's blood guilt enough that we're party to a war 'gainst our own planetmen, without being safe into the bargain."

He wondered how many shared her feelings. Probably no large number. After he and Inyanduma flew to the City and got the Warden to mobilize his constables, a call had gone out for volunteers. The Nyanzan public had only been informed that a dangerous conspiracy had been discovered, centered in Rossala, that the Sheikh had refused the

police right of entry, and that therefore a large force would be needed to seize that nation over the resistance of its misguided citizens and occupy it while the Warden's specialists sniffed out the actual plotters. And men had come by the many thousands, from all over the planet.

It was worse, though, for those who knew what really lay behind this police operation.

Flandry mused aloud, "I wonder if you'll ever start feeling that way about your fellow men, wherever they happen to live?"

"Enough!" rapped Derek Ombolu. "Say why you brought us hither and be done!"

Flandry kindled a cigaret and stared over the rail, into chuckling sun-glittering waves so clear that he could see how the darkness grew with every meter of depth. He said:

"Down there, if he hasn't been warned somehow that I know about him, is the enemy."

"Ai-a!" Tessa Hoorn dropped a hand to her gun; but Flandry saw with an odd little pain how she moved all unthinkingly closer to Derek. "But who would lair in drowned Uhunhu?"

"The name I know him by is A'u," said Flandry. "He isn't human. He can breathe water as well as air—I suppose his home planet must be pretty wet, though I don't know where it is. But it's somewhere in the Merseian Empire, and he, like me, belongs to the second oldest profession. We've played games before now. I flushed him on Conjumar two Earth-years ago: my boys cleaned up his headquarters, and his personal spaceship took a near miss that left it lame and radioactive. But he got away. Not home, his ship wasn't in that good a condition, but away."

Flandry trickled smoke sensuously through his nostrils. It might be the last time. "On the basis of what I've seen here, I'm now certain that friend A'u made for Nyanza, ditched, contacted some of your malcontents, and started cooking revolution. The whole business has his signature, with flourishes. If nothing else, a Nyanzan uprising and Merseian intervention would get him passage home; and he might have inflicted a major defeat on Terra in the process."

A mumbling went through the crewfolk, wrath which was half terror. "Sic semper local patriots," finished Flandry. "I want to be ruddy damn sure of getting A'u, and he has a whole ocean bottom to hide on if he's alarmed, and we'll be too busy setting traps for the Merseian gunrunners due next week to play tag for very long. Otherwise I'd certainly have waited till we could bring a larger force."

"Thirty men 'gainst one poor hunted creature?" scoffed Tessa.

"He's a kind of big creature," said Flandry quietly to her.

He looked at his followers, beautiful and black in the sunlight, with a thousand hues of blue at their backs, a low little wind touching bare skins, and the clean male shapes of weapons. It was too fair a world to gamble down in dead Uhunhu. Flandry knew with wry precision why

he was leading this chase—not for courage, nor glory, nor even one more exploit to embroider for some high-powered yellow-haired bit of Terran fluff. He went because he was an Imperial and if he stayed behind the colonials would laugh at him.

Therefore he took one more drag of smoke, flipped his cigaret parabatically overboard, and murmured: "Be good, Tessa, and I'll bring you back a lollipop. Let's go, chilluns."

And snapped down his helmet and dived cleanly over the side.

The water became a world. Overhead was an area of sun-dazzle, too bright to look on; elsewhere lay cool dusk fading downward into night. The submarine was a basking whale shape . . . too bad he couldn't take it down and torpedo A'u, but an unpleasant session with a man arrested in Altda had told him better—A'u expected to be approached only by swimming men. . . . The roof of sunlight grew smaller as he drove himself toward the bottom, until it was only a tiny blinding star and then nothing. There was a silken sense of his own steadily rippling muscles and the sea that slid past them, the growing chill stirred his blood in its million channels, a glance behind showed his bubble-stream like a trail of tiny argent planets, his followers were black lightning bolts through an utterly quiet green twilight, O God to be a seal!

Dimly now, the weed-grown steeps of Uhunhu rose beneath him, monstrous gray dolmens and menhirs raised by no human hands, sunken a million years ago. . . . A centuries-drowned ship, the embryo of a new reef ten millennia hence, with a few skulls strewn for fish to nest in, was shockingly raw and new under the leaning walls. Flandry passed it in the silence of a dream.

He did not break that quietude, though his helmet bore voice apparatus. If A'u was still here, A'u must not be alarmed by orders to fan out in a search pattern. Flandry soared close enough to Derek to nod, and the giant waved hands and feet in signals understood by the men. Presently Flandry and Derek were alone in what might once have been a street or perhaps a corridor.

They glided among toppling enormities; now and then one of denser shadow, but it was only a rock or a decapus or a jawbone the size of a portal. Flandry began to feel the cold, deeper than his skin, almost deeper than the silence.

A hand clamped bruisingly on his wrist. He churned to a halt and hung there, head cocked, until the sound that Derek had dimly caught was borne past vibrator and ocean and receiver to his own ears. It was the screaming of a man being killed, but so far and faint it might have been the death agony of a gnat.

Flandry blasphemed eighteen separate gods, kicked himself into motion, and went like a hunting eel through Uhunhu. But Derek passed him and he was almost the last man to reach the fight.

"A'u," he said aloud, uselessly, through the bawl of men and the roil

of bloodied waters. He remembered the harpoon rifle slung across his shoulders, unlimbered it, checked the magazine, and wriggled close. Thirty men—no, twenty-nine at the most—a corpse bobbed past, wildly staring through a helmet cracked open—twenty-eight men swirled about one monster. Flandry did not want to hit any of them.

He swam upward, until he looked down on A'u. The great black shape had torpedoed from a dolmen. Fifteen meters long, the wrinkled leather skin of some Arctic golem, the gape of a whale and the boneless arms of an elephant . . . but with hands . . . A'u raged among his hunters. Flandry saw how the legs which served him on land gripped two men in the talons and plucked their limbs off. There was no sound made by the monster's throat, but the puny human jabber was smashed by each flat concussion of the flukes, as if bombs burst.

Flandry nestled the rifle to his shoulder and fired. Recoil sent him backward, end over end. He did not know if his harpoon had joined the score in A'u's tormented flanks. It had to be this way, he thought, explosives would kill the men too under sea pressure and . . . blood spurted from a transfixed huge hand. A'u got his back against a monolith, arched his tail, and shot toward the surface. Men sprayed from him like bow water.

Flandry snapped his legs and streaked to meet the thing. The white belly turned toward him, a cliff, a cloud, a dream. He fired once and saw his harpoon bite. Once more! A'u bent double in anguish, spoke blood, somehow sensed the man and plunged at him. Flandry looked down a cave of horrible teeth. He looked into the eyes behind; they were blind with despair. He tried to scramble aside. A'u changed course with a snake's ease. Flandry had a moment to wonder if A'u knew him again.

A man flew from the blood-fog. He fired a harpoon, holding himself steady against its back-thrust. Instead of letting the line trail, to tangle the beast, he grabbed it, was pulled up almost to the side. The gills snapped at him like mouths. He followed the monster, turn for turn through cold deeps, as he sought aim. Finally he shot. An eye went out. A brain was cloven. A'u turned over and died.

Flandry gasped after breath. His helmet rang and buzzed, it was stifling him, he must snatch it off before he choked. . . . Hands caught him. He looked into the victory which was Derek Umbolu's face. "Wait there, wait, Terra man," said a remote godlike calm. "All is done now."

"I, I, I, thanks!" rattled Flandry.

His wind came back to him. He counted the men that gathered, while they rose with all due slowness toward the sun. Six were dead. Cheap enough to get rid of A'u.

If I had been cast away, alone, on the entire world of a hideous race . . . I wonder if I would have had the courage to survive this long.

I wonder if there are some small cubs, on a water planet deep among

the Merseian stars, who can't understand why father hasn't come home.

He climbed back on deck at last, threw back his helmet and sat down under Tessa Hoorn's anxious gaze. "Give me a cigaret," he said harshly. "And break out something alcoholic."

She wrestled herself to steadiness. "Caught you the monster?" she asked.

"Aye," said Derek.

"We close to didn't," said Flandry. "Our boy Umbolu gets the credit."

"Small enough vengeance for my father," said the flat voice of sorrow.

The submarine's captain saluted the pale man who sat hugging his knees, shivering and drinking smoke. "Word just came in from Rossala, sir," he reported. "The Sheikh has yielded, though he swears he'll protest the outrage to the next Imperial resident. But he'll let the constables occupy his realm and search as they wish."

Search for a number of earnest, well-intentioned young patriots, who'll never again see morning over broad waters. Well—I suppose it all serves the larger good. It must. Our noble homosexual Emperor says so himself.

"Excellent," said Flandry. His glance sought Derek. "Since you saved my life, you've got a reward coming. Your father."

"Hoy?" The big young man trod a backward step.

"He isn't dead," said Flandry. "I talked him into helping me. We faked an assassination. He's probably at home this minute, suffering from an acute case of conscience."

"What?" The roar was like hell's gates breaking down.

Flandry winced. "Pianissimo, please." He waved the snarling, fist-clenching bulk back with his cigaret. "All right, I played a trick on you."

"A trick I could have waited from a filthy Impy!" Tessa Hoorn spat at his feet.

"Touch me, brother Umbolu, and I'll arrest you for treason," said Flandry. "Otherwise I'll exercise my discretionary powers and put you on lifetime probation in the custody of some responsible citizen." He grinned wearily. "I think the Lightmistress of Little Skua qualifies."

Derek and Tessa stared at him, and at each other.

Flandry stood up. "Probation is conditional on your getting married," he went on. "I recommend that in choosing a suitable female you look past that noble self-righteousness, stop considering the trivium that she can give you some money, and consider all that you might give her." He glanced at them, saw that their hands were suddenly linked together, and had a brief, private, profane conversation with the Norn of his personal destiny. "That includes heirs," he finished. "I'd like to have Nyanza well populated. When the Long Night comes for Terra, somebody will have to carry on. It might as well be you."

He walked past them, into the cabin to get away from all the dark young eyes.



THE DEVIL & MRS. ACKENBAUGH—(continued from page 79)

the turn of events." Suddenly he was not there any more; there was only the echo of a harsh laugh.

She slept that night as if an anesthetic hand had been laid on her brow. Consciousness returned slowly when she felt strong, warm sunlight flooding her face. She worried that George would be late for school, then she remembered it was Saturday. Something was at the edge of her consciousness nagging at her, a premonition, a small danger signal. And then remembrance forced her wide awake. She opened her eyes to see a strange ceiling overhead, and the walls were a different color. She raised herself cautiously on one elbow and found herself staring into Mr. Crumb's relaxed open mouth. How much he resembled her own husband in sleep! Mrs. Ackenbaugh felt an urge to shake him and tell him to close his mouth.

But the strangeness and wonder of it held her speechless. She flopped back down on her back to assimilate the miracle. She was really with *Clarence!* She thought with brief regret of her own husband so far away and lonely. And what about Ruth Crumb; where had she gone to? "But I'll worry about that later," she thought luxuriously. She stretched an arm out to touch Clarence's shoulder but paused as she stared at the outstretched hand: there were tiny black hairs growing down the back of her hand instead of the golden down she was accustomed to. And the fingers were stubbier. . . .

Suddenly she leaped out of bed with a wild yell, "My body!" She ran toward the mirror, already knowing and dreading what it would show: Ruth Crumb's round, ordinary good-natured face topping Ruth's short plump body.

Mr. Crumb was groggily pulling himself up out of bed. He looked at her with an absolutely blank stare, grunted and resumed fumbling with the frayed belt of his bathrobe.

The phone rang shrilly and she was still standing there numb when she heard Clarence's sleepy "Hello." Then he was thrusting the phone into her hands and she could hear her own high-pitched voice chattering away. "Ruth darling," this impostor was saying, "I woke up practically in the middle of the night with the most wonderful idea. George has Thanksgiving Week holiday and I felt I just had to see you both again. Would it be a terrible imposition if we asked you to put us up for a couple of days?"

The former Mrs. Ackenbaugh heard herself saying, "Of course not, Yvette dear, we'd love to have you. . . ."

When she hung up, the new Mrs. Crumb stumbled into the bedroom and put her new plain face in her new stubby hands. Now she saw what the third price was.



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Market Gardening
Exams: Local Government Exam. Board, Certificated Gardener, Royal Hort. Society General

MANAGEMENT

Business Management
Hotel Management
Industrial Management
Office Management
Personnel Management
Sales Management
Works Management
Work Study
Foremanship
Exams: Inst. of Works Managers, Inst. of Office Management, Inst. of Personnel Management, Inst. of Service Management, Purchasing Officers' Assoc., Inst. of Public Supplies, Inst. of Work Study, etc.

MECHANICAL & MOTOR ENGINEERING

Engineering Mathematics
Diesel Engines
Inspection
Industrial Instrumentation
Workshop Practice
Welding
Refrigeration & Air Cond.
Motor Mechanics
(many other subjects)
Exams: Inst. of Mechanical Engineers, Soc. of Engineers

PHOTOGRAPHY

Practical Photography
Exams: Photo. Dealers' Assoc.

RADIO T.V. & ELECTRICAL Servicing & Engineering

Radio Construction (with kits)
Electricians
Electrical Contractors
Exams: British Inst. of Radio Engineers, Society of Engineers, P.M.G. Certs. in Radio Telegraphy, City & Guilds Certs. in Telecommunication Technicians, Radio Amateurs, Radio & T.V. Servicing (R.T.E.B.), Electrical Engineering Practice, Electrical Installations

SELLING

Company Representatives' Commercial Travellers' Retail Selling
Sales Management
Marketing
Exams: Inst. of Marketing & Sales Management (Diploma in Marketing) United Commercial Travellers' Assoc.

WRITING FOR PROFIT

Short Story Writing
Free-Lance Journalism

MANY OTHER SUBJECTS INCLUDING

Chemical Engineering
Petroleum Production
Textile Technology
Ice Cream Technology
Small Boat Sailing
Dressmaking

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